

SERMONS

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the most Reverend

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L A T E

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VOLUME *the* SEVENTH.



L O N D O N:

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M DCC XLIII.



S E R M O N CXI.

The danger of all known sin, both from
the light of nature and revelation.

R O M. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of GOD is manifest in them, for GOD hath shewed it unto them.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the apostle declares that he was particularly designed and appointed by GOD to preach the gospel to the world, and that he was not ashamed of his ministry, notwithstanding all the reproach and persecution it was attended withal, and notwithstanding the slight and undervaluing opinion which the world had of the doctrine which he preached, it being “to the Jews a “stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;” for tho’ this might reflect some disparagement upon it in the esteem of sensual and carnal men, yet to those who weighed things impartially, and consider’d the excellent end and design of the christian doctrine, and the force and efficacy of it to that end, it will appear to be an instrument admirably fitted by the wisdom of GOD, for the reformation and salvation of mankind.

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The first
sermon on
this text.

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And therefore he tells us, verse 16. that how much soever it was despised by that ignorant and inconsiderate age, " he was not ashamed of the gospel of CHRIST; because it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek;" that is, the doctrine of the gospel sincerely believed and embraced, is a most proper and powerful means, designed by God for the salvation of mankind; not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles.

The revelations which God had formerly made, were chiefly restrained to the jewish nation; but this great and last revelation of the gospel, was equally calculated for the benefit and advantage of all mankind. The gospel indeed was first preached to the Jews, and from thence publish'd to the whole world; and as this doctrine was design'd for the general benefit of mankind, so it was very likely to be effectual to that end, being an instrument equally fitted for the salvation of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews; " it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

And to shew the efficacy of it, he instanceth in two things, which render it so powerful and effectual a means for the salvation of mankind.

First, because therein the grace and mercy of God in the justification of a sinner, and declaring him righteous, is so clearly revealed, ver. 17. " For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." This is very obscurely exprest, but the meaning of this text will be very much cleared, by comparing it with another in the iiii chapter of this epistle, ver.

20, 21, 22, &c. where the apostle speaks more fully and expressly of the way of our justification by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, that is, by the belief of the gospel. He asserts at the 20th verse, "that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of GOD." To this way of justification "by the deeds of the law," he opposeth "the righteousness of GOD by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, to all, and upon all them that believe," which is the gospel way of justification, ver. 21, 22. "But now the righteousness of GOD without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of GOD, which is by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, unto all, and upon all them that believe." "The righteousness of GOD without the law is manifested:" that is, the way which GOD hath taken to justify sinners, and declare them righteous "without the deeds of the law," that is, without observing the law of Moses, "is manifested," that is, is clearly revealed in the gospel, (which is the same with what the apostle had said before, that "the righteousness of GOD is revealed in the gospel) being witnessed by the law and the prophets," that is, the righteousness of GOD, or the justification of sinners by JESUS CHRIST, is clearly revealed in the gospel, being also in a more obscure manner attested or foretold in the old testament, which he calls "the law and the prophets;" and this fully explains that difficult phrase of "the righteousness of GOD being revealed by the gospel from faith to faith;" that is, by a gradual revelation, being more obscurely foretold in the old testament, and clearly discovered in the new; so that these two passages are equivalent;

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“lent; “ in the gospel, the righteousness of God is
 “ revealed from faith to faith;” and “ the righte-
 “ ousness of God without the works of the law is
 “ manifested, being witnessed by the law and the
 “ prophets.” There is the first and more imperfect
 revelation of it, but the clear revelation of it is in the
 gospel; this the apostle calls “ a revelation from faith
 “ to faith,” that is from a more imperfect and obscure,
 to a more express and clear discovery and belief of it.
 And then the citation which follows is very pertinent,
 “ as it is written, the just shall live by faith;” for this
 citation out of the old testament plainly shews, that
 the way of justification by faith was there mentioned;
 or, as our apostle expresseth it, “ was witnessed by the
 “ law and the prophets;” and consequently that this
 was a gradual discovery, which he calls “ a revelation
 “ from faith to faith.” “ The just shall live by faith;”
 that is, good men shall be saved by their faith, shall
 be justified and esteemed righteous in the sight of
 God, and finally saved by their faith. And so the
 apostle in the vth chap. of this epistle, ver. 18. calls
 our justification by the faith of the gospel, “ the
 “ justification of life,” in opposition to condemna-
 tion and death, which very well explains that saying
 of the prophet, “ the just shall live by faith.” I
 have been the longer upon this, that I might give
 some light to a very difficult and obscure text.

Secondly, the other instance whereby the apostle
 proves the gospel to be so powerful a means for the
 recovery and salvation of men is, that therein also
 the severity of God against impenitent sinners, as
 well as his grace and mercy in the justification of the
 penitent, is clearly revealed, ver. 18. “ For the wrath
 “ of God is revealed from heaven, against a
 “ ungodline

“ ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold SERM.

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“ the truth in unrighteousness; because that which
“ may be known of God is manifested in them, for
“ God hath shewn it unto them.” The first, viz.
the grace of God in our justification and the remission of sins past, is a most proper and powerful argument to encourage us to obedience for the future; nothing being more likely to reclaim men to their duty, than the assurance of indemnity for past crimes; and the other is one of the most effectual considerations in the world to deter men from sin, that “ the
“ wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all
“ ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, &c.”

From which words I shall observe these six things.

First, the infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. “ The wrath of
“ God is here said to be revealed against the impiety
“ and unrighteousness of men.”

Secondly, the clear and undoubted revelation which the gospel hath made of this danger. “ The wrath
“ of God ” against the sins of men, is said to be
“ revealed from heaven.”

Thirdly, that every wicked and vicious practice doth expose men to this great danger. “ The wrath
“ of God ” is said to be “ revealed against all un-
“ godliness, and unrighteousness of men.”

Fourthly, that it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The apostle here aggravates the impiety and wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to the knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, which he calls “ holding
“ the truth in unrighteousness.”

Fifthly,

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Fifthly, the natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live wickedly, is a clear evidence of their "holding the truth in unrighteousness." The apostle therefore chargeth them with "holding the truth in unrighteousness," because "that which may be known of God is manifested in them, God having shewed it to them."

Sixthly, and lastly, that the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the gospel, against the impiety and wickedness of men, renders it a very powerful and likely means for the recovery and salvation of men. For the apostle proves "the gospel of CHRIST to be the power of God to salvation," because "therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" that is, against all impenitent sinners.

I shall at the present, by God's assistance, speak to the three first of these particulars.

First, the infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. If there be a God that made the world, and governs it, and takes care of mankind, and hath given them laws and rules to live by, he cannot but be greatly displeased at the violation and transgression of them; and certainly the displeasure of God is the most dreadful thing in the world, and the effects of it the most insupportable. The greatest fear is from the greatest danger, and the greatest danger is from the greatest power offended and enraged; and this is a consideration exceeding full of terror, that by a sinful course we expose ourselves to the utmost displeasure of the great and terrible God; for "who knows the power of his wrath?" and "who may stand before him when once he is angry? according to thy

“thy fear, so is thy wrath” (saith the Psalmist.) SERM.

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There is no passion in the mind of man that is more boundless and infinite than our fear; it is apt to make wild and frightful representations of evils, and to imagine them many times greater than really they are; but in this case our imagination must fall short of the truth and terror of the thing; for the wrath of God doth far exceed the utmost jealousy and suspicion of the most fearful and guilty conscience; and the greatest sinner under his greatest anguish and despair, cannot apprehend or fear it more than there is reason for; “according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.”

If it were only the wrath and displeasure of men that the sinner were exposed to, there might be reason enough for fear, because they have many times power enough to crush an offender, and cruelty enough to fret every vein of his body, and to torment him in every part: but the wrath and vengeance of men bears no comparison with the wrath of God. Their passions are many times strong and blustering; but their arm is but short, and their power small, “they have not an arm like God, nor “can they thunder with a voice like him.” They may design considerable harm and mischief to us; but it is not always in the power of their hand to wreak their malice upon us, and to execute all the mischief which their enraged minds may prompt them to; the very utmost they can design, is to torment our bodies, and to take away our lives, and when they have designed this, they may die first, and “re-
“turn to their dust, and then their thoughts perish
“with them,” and all their malicious designs are at an end; they are always under the power and go-

vernment of a superior being, and can go no farther than he gives them leave. However if they do their worst, and shoot all their arrows at us, we cannot stand at the mark long, their wrath will soon make an end of us, and set us free from all their cruelty and oppression; "they can but kill the body, and "after that they have no more that they can do;" their most refined malice cannot reach our spirits, no weapon that can be formed by the utmost art of man can pierce and wound our souls; they can drive us out of this world, but they cannot pursue us into the other; so that at the worst the grave will be a sanctuary to us, and death a safe retreat from all their rage and fury.

But the wrath of GOD is not confined by any of these limits. "Once hath GOD spoken" (saith David by an elegant hebrew phrase to express the certainty of the thing) "once hath GOD "spoken, and twice I have heard this, that "power belongs to GOD," Psal. lxii. 11. "He "hath a mighty arm," and when he pleaseth to stretch it out, none may stay it, nor "say unto him "what dost thou;" he hath power enough to make good all his threatnings; whatever he says he is able to effect, and whatever he "purposeth he can "bring to pass;" for "his counsel shall stand, and "he will accomplish all his pleasure;" he need but speak the word, and it is done; for we can neither resist his power, nor fly from it; if we fly to the utmost parts of the earth, his hand can reach us, for "in his hand are all the corners of the earth;" if we take refuge in the grave (and we cannot do that without his leave) thither his wrath can follow us; and there it will overtake us; for his power is not confined to this world,

world, nor limited to our bodies;” after he hath kill’d, he can “destroy both body and soul in hell.”

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And this is that wrath of God which is “revealed “from heaven,” and which the apostle chiefly intends, viz. the misery and punishment of another world, this God hath threatned sinners withal; to express which to us, as fully as words can do, he heaps up in the next chapter so many weighty and terrible words, “indignation and wrath, tribulation “and anguish upon every soul of man that doth “evil;” in opposition to that great and glorious reward of “immortality and eternal life,” which is promised to “a patient continuance in well-“doing.”

So that “the wrath of God” which is here denounced “against the impiety and unrighteousness “of men,” comprehends all the evils and miseries of this and the other world, which every sinner is in danger of whilst he continues impenitent; for as according to the tenor of the gospel, “godliness “hath the promises of this life, and of that which is “to come,” so impenitency in sin exposeth men to the evils of both worlds, to the judgments of the life that now is, and to the endless and intolerable torments of that which is to come. And what can be more dreadful than the displeasure of an almighty and eternal being? who can punish to the utmost, and “who lives for ever,” to execute his wrath and vengeance upon sinners; so that well might the apostle say, “it is a fearful thing to fall “into the hands of the living God.”

“Consider this, all ye that forget God,” that neglect him, and live in continual disobedience to his holy and righteous laws; much more those who de-

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spite and affront him, and live in a perpetual defiance of him. “Will ye provoke the LORD to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?” think of it seriously, and forget him if you can, despise him if you dare; consider this, lest he take you into consideration, and rouse like a lion out of sleep, and “tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” This is the first observation, the infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth expose men to, “the wrath of God,” which doth not only signify more than all the evils that we know, but than all those which the wildest fears and suspicions of our minds can imagine.

Secondly, the next thing observable, is the clear and undoubted revelation which the gospel has made of this danger, “the wrath of God is revealed, &c.” By which the apostle intimates to us, that this was but obscurely known to the world before, at least in comparison of that clear discovery which the gospel hath now made of it; so that I may allude to that expression in Job, which he applies to death and the grave, that “hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering.”

Not but that mankind had always apprehensions and jealousies of the danger of a wicked life, and sinners were always afraid of the vengeance of God pursuing their evil deeds, not only in this life, but after it too; and tho’ they had turn’d the punishments of another world into ridiculous fables, yet the wiser sort of mankind could not get it out of their minds, that there was something real under them; and that Ixion’s wheel, which by a perpetual motion carried him about; and Sisyphus his stone; which he was perpetually rolling up the hill, and when

when he had got it near the top tumbled down, and still created him a new labour; and Tantalus his continual hunger and thirst, aggravated by a perpetual nearness of enjoyment, and a perpetual disappointment; and Prometheus his being chained to a rock, with an eagle or vulture perpetually preying upon his liver, which grew as fast as it was gnawed; I say even the wiser among the heathens look'd upon these as fantastical representations of something that was real, viz. the grievous and endless punishment of sinners, the not to be endured, and yet perpetually renewed torments of another world, for in the midst of all the ignorance and degeneracy of the heathen world, mens consciences did accuse them when they did amiss, and they had secret fears and misgivings of some mighty danger hanging over them from the displeasure of a superior being, and the apprehension of some great mischiefs likely to follow their wicked actions, which some time or other would overtake them; which because they did not always in this world, they dreaded them in the next. And this was the foundation of all those superstitions, whereby the ancient pagans endeavoured so carefully to appease their offended deities, and to avert the calamities which they feared they would send down upon them. But all this while they had no certain assurance by any clear and express revelation from God to that purpose, but only the jealousies and suspicions of their own minds, naturally consequent upon those notions which men generally had of God, but so obscured and depraved by the lusts and vices of men, and by the gross and false conceptions which they had of God, that they only serv'd to make them superstitious, but were not

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not clear and strong enough to make them wisely and seriously religious. And to speak the truth, the more knowing and inquisitive part of the heathen world had brought all these things into great doubt and uncertainty, by the nicety and subtilty of disputes about them; so that it was no great wonder, that these principles had no greater effect upon the lives of men, when their apprehensions of them were so dark and doubtful.

But the gospel hath made a most clear and certain revelation of these things to mankind. It was written before upon mens hearts as the great sanction of the law of nature, but the impressions of this were in a great measure blurred and worn out, so that it had no great power and efficacy, upon the minds and manners of men; but now it is clearly discovered to us, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven," which expression may well imply in it these three things.

First, the clearness of the discovery; "the wrath of God is said to be revealed."

Secondly, the extraordinary manner of it; it is said to be "revealed from heaven."

Thirdly, the certainty of it; not being the result of subtle and doubtful reasonings, but having a divine testimony and confirmation given to it, which is the proper meaning of "being revealed from heaven."

First, it imports the clearness of the discovery. The punishment of sinners in another world is not so obscure a matter as it was before; it is now expressly declared in the gospel, together with the particular circumstances of it, namely, that there is another life after this, wherein men shall receive the
just

ust recompence of reward for all the actions done by them in this life; that there is a particular time appointed, wherein God will call all the world to a solemn account, and those who are in their graves shall by a powerful voice be raised to life, and those who shall then be found alive shall be suddenly changed; “when our LORD JESUS CHRIST,” the eternal and only begotten SON of GOD, who once came in great humility to save us, shall come again “in power, and great glory,” attended with his mighty angels, and “all nations shall be gathered before him,” and all mankind shall be separated into two companies, the righteous and the wicked, who after a full hearing, and fair trial, shall be sentenced according to their actions, the one “to eternal life and happiness,” the other “to everlasting misery and torment.”

So that the gospel hath not only declared the thing to us, that there shall be a future judgment; but for our farther assurance and satisfaction in this matter, and that these things might make a deep impression, and strike a great awe upon our minds, God hath been pleased to reveal it to us with a great many particular circumstances, such as are very worthy of God, and apt to fill the minds of men with dread and astonishment, as often as they think of them.

For the circumstances of this judgment revealed to us in the gospel, are very solemn and awful, not such as the wild fancies and imaginations of men would have been apt to have drest it up withal, such as are the fictions of the heathen poets, and the extravagancies of Mahomet; which tho’ they be terrible enough, yet they are withal ridiculous; but such as are every way becoming the majesty of the great

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great GOD, and the solemnity of the great day, and such as do not in the least favour of the vanity and lighness of humane imagination.

For what more fair and equal, than that men should be tried by a man like themselves, one of the same rank and condition, that had experience of the infirmities and temptations of humane nature? for our LORD tells us, that "the FATHER hath committed all judgment to the SON, because he is the SON of man," and therefore cannot be excepted against, as not being a fit and equal judge. And this St. Paul offers as a clear proof of the equitable proceedings of that day; "GOD (says he) hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained."

And then what more congruous than that the SON of GOD, who had taken so much pains for the salvation of men, and came into the world for that purpose, and had used all imaginable means for the reformation of mankind, I say what more congruous than that this very person should be honoured by GOD to sit in judgment upon the world, and to condemn those, who after all the means that had been tried for their recovery, would not repent and be saved. And what more proper, than that men, who are to be judged for "things done in the body," should be judged in the body, and consequently that the resurrection of the dead should precede the general judgment?

And what more magnificent and suitable to this glorious solemnity, than the awful circumstance which the scripture mentions of the appearance of this great judge; that he shall "descend from heaven"

“ heaven” in great majesty and glory, attended with
“ his mighty angels, and that every eye shall see
“ him;” that upon his appearance, the frame of nature, shall be in an agony, and the whole world in flame and confusion; that those great and glorious bodies of light shall be obscured, and by degrees extinguish’d; “ the sun shall be darkned, and the
“ moon turned into blood, and all the powers of
“ heaven shaken;” yea, “ the heavens themselves
“ shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements dissolve with fervent heat; the earth also,
“ and all the works that are therein shall be burnt
“ up.” I appeal to any man, whether this be not a representation of things very proper and suitable to that great day, wherein he who made the world shall come to judge it? and whether the wit of man ever devised any thing so awful, and so agreeable to the majesty of God, and the solemn judgment of the whole world? The description which Virgil makes of the judgment of another world, of the elysian fields, and the infernal regions, how infinitely do they fall short of the majesty of the holy scripture, and the description there made of heaven and hell, and of the great and terrible day of the LORD! so that in comparison they are childish and trifling; and yet perhaps he had the most regular and most govern’d imagination of any man that ever lived, and observed the greatest decorum in his characters and descriptions. But who can declare “ the great
“ things of God, but he to whom God shall reveal them!”

Secondly, this expression of “ the wrath of God
“ being revealed from heaven,” doth not only im-

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ply the clear discovery of the thing, but likewise something extraordinary in the manner of the discovery. It is not only a natural impression upon the minds of men, that God will severely punish sinners; but he hath taken care that mankind should be instructed in this matter in a very particular and extraordinary manner. He hath not left it to the reason of men to collect it from the consideration of his attributes and perfections, his holiness and justice, and from the consideration of the promiscuous administration of his providence towards good and bad men in this world, but he hath been pleased to send an extraordinary person from heaven, on purpose to declare this thing plainly to the world, “ the wrath of God is revealed from heaven;” that is, God sent his own Son from heaven, on purpose to declare his wrath against all obstinate and impenitent sinners, that he might effectually awaken the drowsy world to repentance; he hath sent an extraordinary ambassador into the world, to give warning to all those who continue in their sins, of the judgment of the great day, and to summon them before his dreadful tribunal. So the apostle tells the Athenians, Acts xvii. 30, 31. “ Now he commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

Thirdly, this expression implies likewise the certainty of this discovery. If the wrath of God had only been declared in the discourses of wise men, tho’ grounded upon very probable reason, yet it might have been brought into doubt by the contrary reasonings

ings of subtle and disputing men: but to put the matter out of all question, we have a divine testimony for it, and God hath confirmed it from heaven, by signs, and wonders, and miracles, especially by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead; for “by this he hath given assurance unto all men, “that it is he who is ordained of God to judge the “quick and the dead.”

Thus you see in what respect “the wrath of God” is said to be “revealed from heaven,” in that the gospel hath made a more clear, and particular, and certain discovery of the judgment of the great day, than ever was made to the world before. I proceed to the

Third observation, which I shall speak but briefly to; namely, that every wicked and vicious practice doth expose men to this dreadful danger. The apostle instanceth in the two chief heads to which the sins of men may be reduced, impiety towards God, and unrighteousness towards men; and therefore he is to be understood to denounce the wrath of God against every particular kind of sin, comprehended under these general heads; so that no man that allows himself in any impiety and wickedness of life, can hope to escape the wrath of God. Therefore it concerns us to be entirely religious, and “to have “respect to all God’s commandments;” and to take heed that we do not allow ourselves in the practice of any kind of sin whatsoever, because the living in any one known sin, is enough to expose us to the dreadful wrath of God. Tho’ a man be just and righteous in his dealings with men, yet if he neglect the worship and service of God, this will certainly bring him under condemnation: and on the other hand, tho’ a man may serve God never so diligently and devout-

ly, yet if he be defective in righteousness toward men, if he deal falsely and fraudulently with his neighbour, he shall not escape the wrath of God; tho' a man pretend to never so much piety and devotion, yet if he be unrighteous, "he shall not inherit the kingdom of God;" if any man "overreach and defraud his brother in any matter, the LORD is the avenger of such," saith St. Paul 1 Theff. iv. 6.

So that here is a very powerful argument to take men off from all sin, and to engage them to a constant and careful discharge of their whole duty toward God and men, and to reform whatever is amiss either in the frame and temper of their minds, or in the actions and course of their lives; because any kind of wickedness, any one sort of vicious course, lays men open to the vengeance of God, and the punishments of another world; "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men;" there is no exception in the case, we must forsake all sin, subdue every lust, "be holy in all manner of conversation," otherwise we can have no reasonable hopes of escaping the wrath of God, and the damnation of hell. But to proceed to the

Fourth observation; namely, that it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The apostle here aggravates the wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to that knowledge which they had of God, - but contradicted it in their lives, "holding the truth of God in unrighteousness." And that he speaks here of the heathen, is plain from his following discourse, and the character he gives of those

those persons of whom he was speaking, "who hold
 " the truth of God in unrighteousness; because that
 " which may be known of God is manifest in them,
 " for God hath shewn it unto them;" and this he
 proves, because those who were destitute of divine
 revelation, were not without all knowledge of God,
 being led by the sight of this visible world, to the
 knowledge of an invisible being and power that was
 the author of it, ver. 20, 21. "For the invisible things
 " of him from the creation of the world are clearly
 " seen, being understood by the things which are
 " made, even his eternal power and godhead,
 " so that they are without excuse; because that when
 " they knew God, they glorified him not as God."
 (*Hæc est summa delicti, nolle agnoscere, quem ignorare
 non possis*, saith Tertullian to the heathen; "this is
 " the height of thy fault, not to acknowledge him,
 " whom thou canst not but know, not to own him,
 " of whom thou canst not be ignorant if thou
 " wouldst;") "neither were thankful;" they did not
 pay those acknowledgments to him which of right
 were due to the author of their being, and of all
 good things; ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς
 αὐτῶν, "they were fool'd with their own reasonings."
 This he speaks of the philosophers, who in those
 great arguments of the being and providence of
 God, the immortality of the soul, and the rewards
 of another world, had lost the truth by too much
 subtilty about it, and had disputed themselves into
 doubt and uncertainty about those things which were
 naturally known; for *nimiùm altercando veritas amit-*
titur; "truth is many times lost by too much con-
 " tention and dispute about it, and by too eager a
 " pursuit of it men many times out-run it; and
 " leave

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"selves to be wise they became fools." Men never play the fools more, than by endeavouring to be over-subtle and wise; ver. 23. "and changed the glory of " the incorruptible God, into an image made like to " corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed " beasts, and creeping things;" here he speaks of the sottishness of their idolatry, whereby they provoked God to give them up to all manner of lewdness and impurity, ver. 24. "wherefore God also " gave them up unto uncleanness, through the lusts " of their own hearts;" and again, ver. 26. "for " this cause God gave them up to vile affections;" and then he enumerates the abominable lusts and vices they were guilty of, notwithstanding their natural acknowledgment of the divine justice, ver. 32. "who knowing the judgment of God, that they " which commit such things are worthy of death, " not only do the same, but have pleasure in them " that do them." By all which it appears that he speaks of the heathen, who offended against the natural light of their own minds, and therefore were without excuse. *Quam sibi veniam sperare possunt impietatis suæ, qui non agnoscunt cultum ejus, quem prorsus ignorari ab hominibus fas non est?* saith Lactantius, "how can they hope for pardon of their impiety, " who deny to worship that God, of whom it is " not possible mankind should be wholly ignorant?"

So that this is "to hold the truth in unrighteousness," injuriously to suppress it, and to hinder the power and efficacy of it upon our minds and actions; for so the word *κατέχευ* sometimes signifies, as well as to hold fast, and this every man does, who
acts

acts contrary to what he believes and knows; he offers violence to the light of his own mind, and does injury to the truth, and keeps that a prisoner, which would set him free; "ye shall know the truth (says our LORD) and the truth shall make you free."

And this is one of the highest aggravations of the sins of men, to offend against knowledge, and that light which God hath set up in every man's mind. If men wander and stumble in the dark, it is not to be wonder'd at; many times it is unavoidable, and no care can prevent it: but in the light it is expected men should look before them, and discern their way. That natural light which the heathen had, though it was but comparatively dim and imperfect, yet the apostle takes notice of it as a great aggravation of their idolatrous and abominable practices. Those natural notions which all men have of God, if they had in any measure attended to them, and govern'd themselves by them, might have been sufficient to have preserved them from dishonouring the deity, by worshipping creatures instead of God; the common light of nature was enough to have discovered to them the evil of those lewd and unnatural practices, which many of them were guilty of; but they detained and suppress the truth most injuriously, and would not suffer it to have its natural and proper influence upon them; and this is that which left them without excuse, that from the light of nature they had knowledge enough to have done better, and to have preserved them from those great crimes which were so common among them.

And

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And if this was so great an aggravation of the impiety and wickedness of the heathen, and left them “without excuse;” what apology can be made for the impiety and unrighteousness of christians, who have so strong and clear a light to discover to them their duty, and the danger of neglecting it, to whom “the wrath of GOD is plainly revealed “from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?” The truths of the gospel are so very clear and powerful, and such an improvement of natural light, that men must use great force and violence to suppress them, and to hinder the efficacy of them upon their lives. And this is a certain rule, by how much the greater our knowledge, by so much the less is our excuse, and so much the greater punishment is due to our faults. So our LORD hath told us, Luke xii. 47. “That servant which knew “his LORD’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten “with many stripes.” And John ix. 41. “If ye “were blind (says our SAVIOUR to the Jews) ye “should have no sin.” So much ignorance as there is of our duty, so much abatement of the wilfulness of our faults: but “if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, “there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation,” says the apostle to the Hebrews, chap. x. 26, 27. “If we sin wilfully after we have received the “knowledge of the truth;” implying, that men cannot pretend ignorance for their faults; after so clear a revelation of the will of GOD, as is made to mankind by the gospel.

And

And upon this consideration it is, that our SAVIOUR doth so aggravate the impenitency and unbelief of the Jews, because it was in opposition to all the advantages of knowledge, which can be imagined to be afforded to mankind, John xv. 22, 23, 24. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin;" that is, in comparison their sin had been much more excusable; "but now they have no cloke for their sin." "He that hateth me, hateth my FATHER also: if I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen, and hated both me, and my FATHER." How is that? Our SAVIOUR means, that they had now sinned against all the advantages of knowing the will of GOD, that mankind could possibly have: at once opposing natural light, which was the dispensation of the FATHER; and the clearest revelation of GOD's will, in the dispensation of the gospel by his SON; "now have they both seen and hated both me and FATHER."

The two remaining observations I shall reserve to another opportunity.

S E R M O N CXII.

The danger of all known sin, both from
the light of nature and revelation.

R O M. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of GOD is manifest in them, for GOD hath shewed it unto them.

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The second sermon on this text.

I Have handled four of the observations which I rais'd from these words; and shall now proceed to the other two that remain.

The fifth observation was, that the natural knowledge which men have of GOD, if they live contrary to it, is a sufficient evidence of "their holding the truth of GOD in unrighteousness." For the reason why the apostle chargeth them with this, is, "because that which may be known of GOD is manifest, in that GOD hath shewed it unto them."

There is a natural knowledge of GOD, and of the duty we owe to him, which the apostle calls τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, "that of GOD which is obvious to be known" by the light of nature, and is as much as is absolutely necessary for us to know. There is something of GOD that is incomprehensible, and beyond the reach of our understandings; but his being and essential perfections may be known, which he calls his eternal power and godhead; these he tells

tells us "are clearly seen, being understood by the
" things which are made;" that is, the creation of
the world is a plain demonstration to men, of the
being and power of God; and if so, then "God
" is naturally known to men;" the contrary where-
of Socinus positively maintains, tho' therein he be
forsaken by most of his followers; an opinion, in
my judgment, very unworthy of one, who, not
without reason, was esteemed so great a master of
reason; and (tho' I believe he did not see it) under-
mining the strongest and surest foundation of all re-
ligion, which, when the natural notions of God are
once taken away, will certainly want its best sup-
port. Besides that by denying any natural know-
ledge of God, and his essential perfections, he freely
gives away one of the most plausible grounds of
opposing the doctrine of the Trinity. But because
this is a matter of great consequence, and he was a
great man, and is not to be confuted by contempt,
but by better reason, if it can be found; I will con-
sider his reasons for this opinion, and return a parti-
cular answer to them.

First, he says that if the knowledge of God were
natural, it would not be of faith; but the apostle says,
that "we must believe that he is." The force of
which argument, if it have any, lies in this, that
the object of faith is divine revelation, and there-
fore we cannot be said to believe what we naturally
know. The schoolmen indeed say so; but the
scripture useth the word faith more largely, for a
real persuasion of any thing, whether grounded up-
on sense, or reason, or divine revelation. And our
SAVIOUR's speech to Thomas, "because thou hast
" seen, thou hast believed," does sufficiently inti-

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mate, that a man may believe what he sees; and if so, what should hinder, but that a man may be said to believe what he naturally knows; that is, be really persuaded that there is a God from natural light?

Secondly, his next argument is, because the same apostle concludes Enoch to have believed God, because he pleased God, “and without faith it is impossible to please him.” From whence he says it is certain that men may be without this belief, which if it be natural they cannot. Indeed if the apostle had said, that whoever believes a God, must of necessity obey and please him, then the inference had been good, that all men do not naturally believe a God, because it is certain they do not please him; but it is not good the other way, no more than if a man should argue thus, that because whoever acts reasonably, must be endowed with reason, therefore men are not naturally endowed with reason. For as men may naturally be endowed with reason, and yet not always make use of it; so men may naturally know and believe a God, and yet not be careful to please him.

His third argument is, that the scripture says that there are some that do not believe a God, for which he cites that of David, “the fool hath said in his heart there is no God;” which certainly proves, that bad men live so, as if they believed there were no God; nay, it may farther import, that they endeavour as much as they can, to stifle and extinguish the belief of a God in their minds, and would gladly persuade themselves there is no God, because it is convenient for them there should be none; and whether David meant so or not, is is very probable

able that some may arrive to that height of impiety, as for a time at least, and in some moods, to disbelieve a God, and to be very confident of the arguments on that side. But what then? is the knowledge and belief of a God therefore not natural to mankind? nature it self, as constant and uniform as it is, admits of some irregularities and exceptions, in effects that are meerly natural, much more in those which have something in them that is voluntary, and depends upon the good or bad use of our reason and understanding; and there is no arguing from what is monstrous, against what is natural. It is natural for men to have five fingers upon a hand, and yet some are born otherwise: but in voluntary agents, that which is natural may be perverted, and in a great measure extinguish'd in some particular instances; so that there is no force at all in this objection.

His fourth and last argument is, that there have not only been particular persons, but whole nations who have had no sense, nor so much as suspicion of a deity. This I confess were of great force, if it were true; and for the proof of this, he produceth the instance of Brasil in America. But I utterly deny the matter of fact and history, and challenge any man to bring good testimony, not only of any nation, but of any city in the world, that ever were professed atheists.

I know this was affirmed of some part of Brasil, by some of the first discoverers, who yet at the same time owned, that these very people did most expressly believe the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments of another life; opinions which no man can well reconcile with the denial
and

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and disbelief of a deity. But to put an end to this argument, later and more perfect discoveries have found this not to be true, and do assure us upon better acquaintance with those barbarous people, that they are deeply possess'd with the belief of one supreme God, who made and governs the world.

Having thus given a particular answer to Socinus his arguments against the natural knowledge of a God, I will now briefly offer some arguments for it. And to prove that the knowledge and belief of a God is natural to mankind, my

First argument shall be from the universal consent, in this matter, of all nations in all ages. And this is an argument of great force, there being no better way to prove any thing to be natural to any kind of being, than if it be generally found in the whole kind. *Omnium consensus naturæ vox est*, "the consent of all is the voice of nature," saith Tully. And indeed by what other argument can we prove that reason, and speech, and an inclination to society are natural to men; but that these belong to the whole kind?

Secondly, unless the knowledge of God and his essential perfections be natural, I do not see what sufficient and certain foundation there can be of revealed religion. For unless we naturally know God to be a being of all perfection, and consequently that whatever he says is true, I cannot see what divine revelation can signify. For God's revealing or declaring such a thing to us, is no necessary argument that it is so, unless antecedently to this revelation, we be possess'd firmly with this principle, that whatever God says is true. And whatever is known antecedently to revelation, must be known by

by natural light, and by reasonings and deductions SER M.
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from natural principles. I might farther add to this

argument, that the only standard and measure to judge of divine revelations, and to distinguish between what are true, and what are counterfeit, are the natural notions which men have of God and of his essential perfections.

Thirdly, if the notion of a God be not natural, I do not see how men can have any natural notion of the difference of moral good and evil, just, and unjust. For if I do not naturally know there is a God, how can I naturally know that there is any law obliging to the one, and forbidding the other? all law and obligation to obedience, necessarily supposing the authority of a superior being. But the apostle expressly asserts, that the Gentiles who were destitute of a revealed law, “were a law unto themselves;” but there cannot be a natural law obliging mankind, unless God be naturally known to them.

And this Socinus himself in his discourse upon this very argument is forced to acknowledge. “In
“all men (says he) there is naturally a difference of
“just, and unjust, or at least there is planted in all
“men an acknowledgment that just ought to be
“preferr’d before unjust, and that which is honest,
“before the contrary; and this is nothing else but
“the word of God within a man, which who-
“soever obeys, in so doing obeys God, tho’
“otherwise he neither know nor think there is a
“God; and there is no doubt but he that thus obeys
“God, is accepted of him.” So that here is an acknowledgment of a natural obligation to a law, without any natural knowledge of a superior authority;

rity; which I think cannot be; and which is worse, that a man may obey God acceptably, without knowing and believing there is a God; which directly thwarts the ground of his first argument from those words of the apostle, “without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God,” that is, he that will be religious and please God, “must believe that he is;” so hard is it for any man to contradict nature, without contradicting himself.

Fourthly, my last argument I ground upon the words of the apostle in my text, “that which may be known of God, is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.” “is manifest in them, *ἐν αὐτοῖς* among them,” God hath sufficiently manifested it to mankind. And which way hath God done this? by revelation? or by the natural light of reason? he tells us at the 20th verse, “for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen;” that is, God, who in himself is invisible, ever since he hath created the world, hath given a visible demonstration of himself, that is, “of his eternal power and Godhead, being understood by the things which are made.” The plain sense of the whole is, that this wise and wonderful frame of the world, which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause but God, is a sensible demonstration to all mankind, of an eternal and powerful being that was the author and framer of it. The only question now is, whether this text speaks of the knowledge of God by particular revelation, or by natural light and reason, from the contemplation of the works of God? Socinus having no other way to avoid

avoid the force of this text, will needs understand it of the knowledge of God by the revelation of the gospel. His words are these; "the apostle therefore says in this place, that the eternal God-head of God, that is, that which God would always have us to do (for the Godhead is sometimes taken in this sense) and his eternal power, that is, his promise which never fails, (in which sense he said a little before that the gospel is the power of God) these, I say, were never seen by men, that is, were never known to them since the creation of the world, are known by his works, that is, by the wonderful operation of God, and divine men, especially of CHRIST and his apostles." These are his very words, and now I refer it to any indifferent judgment, whether this be not a very forced and constrained interpretation of this text, and whether that which I have before given, be not infinitely more free and natural, and every way more agreeable to the obvious sense of the words, and the scope of the apostle's argument. For he plainly speaks of the heathen, and proves them to be inexcusable, because "they held the truth in unrighteousness," and having a natural knowledge of God, from the contemplation of his works, and the things which are made, "they did not glorify him as God." And therefore I shall not trouble my self to give any other answer to it; for by the absurd violence of it in every part, it confutes it self more effectually than any discourse about it can do.

I have been the larger upon this, because it is a matter of so great consequence, and lies at the bot-

tom of all religion. For the natural knowledge which men have of God, is when all is done, the surest and fastest hold that religion hath on humane nature. Besides, how should God judge that part of the world, who are wholly destitute of divine revelation, if they had no natural knowledge of him, and consequently could not be under the direction and government of any law? For “where there is no law, there is no transgression;” and where men are guilty of the breach of no law, they cannot be judged and condemned for it; for “the judgment of God is according to truth.”

And now this being establish'd, that men have a natural knowledge of God; if they contradict it by their life and practice, they are guilty of “detaining the truth of God in unrighteousness.” For by this argument the apostle proves the heathen to be guilty of “holding the truth in unrighteousness,” because notwithstanding the natural knowledge which they had of God “by the things which are made,” they lived in the practice of gross idolatry, and the most abominable sins and vices.

And this concerns us much more, who have the glorious light of the gospel added to the light of nature. For if they who offended against the light of nature, were liable to the judgment of God, of how much sorer punishment shall we be thought worthy, if we neglect those infinite advantages which the revelation of the gospel hath superadded to natural light? he hath now set our duty in the clearest and strongest light that ever was afforded to mankind, so that if we will not now believe and repent, there is no remedy for us, but we must “die in our sins;” “if we sin wilfully, after so much knowledge of the truth,

“ truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin ; but S E R M.
“ a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indig- CXII.
“ nation to consume us.”

The sum of what hath been said on this argument, is briefly this ; that men have a natural knowledge of God, and of those great duties which result from the knowledge of him ; so that whatever men say, and pretend as to the main things of religion, “ the “ worship of God, and justice and righteousness “ towards men,” setting aside divine revelation, we are all naturally convinc’d of our duty, and of what we ought to do, and those who live in a bad course, need only be put in mind of what they naturally know, better than any body else can tell them, that they are in a bad course, so that I may appeal to all wicked men from themselves, rash, and heated, and intoxicated with pleasure and vanity, transported and hurried away by lust and passion ; to themselves, serious and composed, and in a cool and considerate temper. And can any sober man forbear to follow the convictions of his own mind, and to resolve to do what he inwardly consents to as best ? let us but be true to ourselves, and obey the dictates of our own minds, and give leave to our own conscience to counsel us, and tell us what we ought to do, and we shall be “ a law to ourselves.”

I proceed to the

Sixth and last observation, namely, that the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the gospel, against the impiety and unrighteousness of men, is one principal thing which renders it so very powerful and likely a means for the salvation of mankind. For the apostle instanceth in two things, which give the gospel so great an advantage to this purpose,

the mercy of GOD to penitent sinners, and his severity toward the impenitent; both which are so fully and clearly revealed in the gospel. "The
" gospel is the power of GOD to salvation, to every
" one that believeth, because therein the righteousness of GOD is revealed;" that is, his great grace and mercy in the justification and pardon of sinners by JESUS CHRIST, which I have already shewn to be meant by "the righteousness of GOD," by comparing this with the explication which is given of "the righteousness of GOD," chap. iii. ver. 22.

The other reason which he gives of the gospel's being "the power of GOD to salvation," is the plain declaration of the severity of GOD toward impenitent sinners, "because therein also the wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." The force of which argument will appear, if we consider these following particulars.

First, that the declarations of the gospel in this matter are so plain and express.

Secondly, that they are very dreadful and terrible.

Thirdly, that there is no safety or hope of impunity for men that go on and continue in their sins.

Fourthly, that this argument will take hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retain its force upon the minds of men, when all other considerations fail, and are of little or no efficacy. And,

Fifthly, that no religion in the world can urge this argument with that force and advantage that christianity does.

First,

First, that the declarations of the gospel in this SERM. CXII.
matter are most plain and express; and that not

only against sin and wickedness in general, but
against particular sins and vices; so that no man
that lives in any evil and vicious course, can be ignorant of his danger. Our LORD hath told us in general,
what shall be the doom of the workers of iniquity,
yea tho' they may have owned him, and made
profession of his name, Matth. vii. 21. "Not every
" one that saith unto me, LORD, LORD, shall enter
" into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the
" will of my FATHER which is in heaven. Many
" will say unto me in that day, LORD, LORD, &c.
" then will I profess unto them, I never knew you,
" depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matth.
xiii. 49, 50. "So shall it be at the end of the world,
" the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked
" from among the just, and shall cast them into the
" furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing
" of teeth," Matth. xxv. 46. "The wicked shall
" go away into everlasting punishment, but the
" righteous into life eternal." John v. 28, 29. "The
" hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves
" shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they
" that have done good, unto the resurrection of life,
" and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection
" of damnation." Rom. ii. 6. St. Paul tells us that
there is "a day of wrath, and of the revelation of
" the righteous judgment of God, who will render
" to every man according to his deeds; to them
" who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteous-
" ness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and an-
" guish upon every soul of man that doth evil."
2 Theff. i. 7, 8, 9. "That the LORD JESUS shall be
" revealed

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“ revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in
“ flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know
“ not GOD, and that obey not the gospel of our
“ LORD JESUS CHRIST; who shall be punished
“ with everlasting destruction from the presence of
“ the LORD, and from the glory of his power.”

Nothing can be more plain and express than these general declarations of the wrath of GOD against sinners; that there is a day of judgment appointed, and a judge constituted to take cognisance of the actions of men, to pass a severe sentence, and to inflict a terrible punishment upon the workers of iniquity.

More particularly our LORD and his apostles have denounced the wrath of GOD against particular sins and vices. In several places of the new testament, there are catalogues given of particular sins, the practice whereof will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of heaven, and expose them to the wrath and vengeance of GOD. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. “ Know ye not
“ that the unrighteous shall not inherit the king-
“ dom of GOD? Be not deceived, neither fornica-
“ tors, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate,
“ nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor
“ thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers,
“ nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of
“ GOD.” So likewise, Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. “ The
“ works of the flesh are manifest, which are these,
“ adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, variance,
“ emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, en-
“ vyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such
“ like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also
“ told you in times past, that they that do such
“ things shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD.”

Col.

Col. iii. 5, 6. "Mortify therefore your members
"upon earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate
"affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness,
"which is idolatry, for which things sake the wrath
"of God cometh on the children of disobedience."

Rev. xxi. 8. "The fearful and unbelieving," (that
is, those who rejected the christian religion, notwith-
standing the clear evidence that was offer'd for it,
and those who out of fear should apostatize from it,)

"The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable,"
(that is, those who were guilty of unnatural lusts, not
fit to be named) "and murderers, and whoremongers,
"and forcerers, and idolaters, and all liars" (that
is, all sorts of false and deceitful and perfidious per-
sons) "shall have their part in the lake which burns
"with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

And not only these gross and notorious sins, which
are such plain violations of the law and light of na-
ture; but those wherein mankind have been apt to
take more liberty, as if they were not sufficiently
convinced of the evil of them; as "the resisting of
"civil authority," which the apostle tells us, they
that are guilty of, "shall receive to themselves dam-
"nation," Rom. xiii. 2. "Profane swearing in
"common conversation," which St. James tells
us brings men under the danger of damna-
tion, chap. v. 12. "Above all things, my brethren,
"swear not, lest ye fall under condemnation." Nay,
our SAVIOUR hath told us plainly, that not only for
wicked actions, but for every evil and sinful word,
men are obnoxious to the judgment of God. So our
LORD assures us, Matth. xii. 36, 37. "I say unto
"you, that every idle word that men shall speak,
"they shall give an account thereof in the day of
"judgment.

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“ judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

He had spoken before of that great and unpardonable sin of “ blaspheming the HOLY GHOST ;” and because this might be thought great severity for evil words, he declares the reason more fully, because words shew the mind and temper of the man, ver. 34. “ For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” “ The character of the man is shewn by his words,” saith Menander. *Proferunt enim mores plerumque oratio* (saith Quintilian) *et animi secreta detegit* ; “ A man’s speech discovers his manners, and the secrets of his heart ; *ut vivit etiam quemque dicere*, men commonly speak as they live ;” and therefore our SAVIOUR adds, “ a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things ; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things : but I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment,” *πᾶν ῥῆμα ἄργόν*, by which I do not think our SAVIOUR means, that men shall be called to account at the day of judgment, for every trifling and impatient and unprofitable word, but every wicked and sinful word of any kind, as if he had said, do you think this severe to make words an unpardonable fault ? I say unto you that men shall not only be condemned for their malicious and blasphemous speeches against the HOLY GHOST ; but they shall likewise give a strict account for all other wicked and sinful speeches in any kind tho’ much inferior to this. And this is not only most agreeable to the scope of our SAVIOUR, but is confirmed by some greek copies, in which it is *πᾶν ῥῆμα πονηρόν*, “ every wicked word which men shall speak, they shall be accountable for it.”

"countable for it at the day of judgment." But SERM.
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this by the by.

Our SAVIOUR likewise tells us, that men shall not only be proceeded against for sins of commission, but for the bare omission and neglect of their duty, especially in works of mercy and charity; for not feeding the hungry, and the like, as we see, Matth. xxv. and that for the omission of these, he will pass that terrible sentence, "depart ye cursed, &c." So that it nearly concerns us to be careful of our whole life, of all our words and actions, since the gospel hath so plainly and expressly declared, that "for all these things God will bring us into judgment." And if the threatnings of the gospel be true, "what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?"

Secondly, as the threatnings of the gospel are very plain and express, so are they likewise very dreadful and terrible. I want words to express the least part of the terror of them; and yet the expressions of scripture concerning the misery and punishment of sinners in another world, are such as may justly raise amazement and horror in those that hear them. Sometimes it is express by "a departing from God," and a perpetual banishment from his presence," who is the foundation of all comfort, and joy, and happiness; sometimes "by the loss of our souls," or our selves. "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" or, (as it is in another evangelist) "to lose himself?" not that our being shall be destroyed; that would be a happy loss indeed,

to him that is sentenced to be for ever miserable; but the man shall still remain, and his body and soul continue to be the foundation of his misery, and a scene of perpetual woe and discontent, which our SAVIOUR calls "the destroying of body and soul in hell," or "going into everlasting punishment, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched." Could I represent to you the horror of that dismal prison, into which wicked and impure souls are to be thrust, and the misery they must there endure, without the least spark of comfort, or glimmering of hope, how they wail and groan under the intolerable wrath of GOD, the insolent scorn and cruelty of devils, the severe lashes and stings, the raging anguish and horrible despair of their own minds, without intermission, without pity, without hope of ever seeing an end of that misery, which yet is unsupportable for one moment; could I represent these things to you according to the terror of them, what effect must they have upon us? and with what patience could any man bear to think of plunging himself into this misery? and by his own wilful fault and folly to endanger his "coming into this place and state of torments?" especially if we consider in the

Third place, that the gospel hath likewise declared, that there is no avoiding of this misery, no hopes of impunity, if men go on and continue in their sins. The terms of the gospel in this are peremptory, that "except we repent, we shall perish;" that "without holiness no man shall see the LORD;" that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And this is a very pressing consideration,

consideration, and brings the matter to a short and plain issue. Either we must leave our sins, or die in them; either we must repent of them, or be judged for them; either we must forsake our sins, and break off that wicked course which we have lived in, or we must quit all hopes of heaven and happiness, nay, we cannot "escape the damnation of hell." The clear revelation of a future judgment is so pressing an argument to repentance, as no man can in reason resist, that hath not a mind to be miserable. "Now (saith St. Paul to the Athenians) he straightly chargeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness."

Men may cheat themselves, or suffer themselves to be deluded by others, about several means and devices of reconciling a wicked life, with the hopes of heaven and eternal salvation; as by mingling some pang of sorrow for sin, and some hot fits of devotion with a sinful life; which is only the interruption of a wicked course, without reformation and amendment of life: but "let no man deceive you with vain words;" for our blessed SAVIOUR hath provided no other ways to save men, but upon the terms of repentance and obedience.

Fourthly, this argument takes hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retains its force upon the minds of men, when almost all other considerations fail, and have lost their efficacy upon us. Many men are gone so far in an evil course, that neither shame of their vices, nor the love of God and virtue, nor the hopes of heaven are of any force with them, to reclaim them and bring them

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to a better mind : but there is one handle yet left, whereby to lay hold of them, and that is their fear. This is a passion that lies deep in our nature, being founded in self-preservation, and sticks so closely to us, that we cannot quit our selves of it, nor shake it off. Men may put off ingenuity, and break thro' all obligations of gratitude. Men may harden their foreheads, and conquer all sense of shame ; but they can never perfectly stifle and subdue their fears ; they can hardly so extinguish the fear of hell, but that some sparks of that fire will ever and anon be flying about in their consciences, especially when they are made sober, and brought to themselves by affliction, and by the present apprehensions of death, have a nearer sight of another world. And if it was so hard for the heathen to conquer these apprehensions, how much harder must it be to christians, who have so much greater assurance of these things, and to whom " the wrath of God is so clearly revealed from " heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness " of men?"

Fifthly, no religion in the world ever urged this argument upon men, with that force and advantage which christianity does. The philosophy of the heathen gave men no steady assurance of the thing ; the most knowing persons among them were not agreed about a future state ; the greatest part of them spake but doubtfully concerning another life. And besides the natural jealousies and suspicions of mankind concerning these things, they had only some fair probabilities of reason, and the authority of their poets, who talk'd they knew not what about the elysian fields, and the infernal regions, and the three judges of hell ; so that the wisest among them had hardly
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assurance enough in themselves of the truth of the thing, to press it upon others with any great confidence, and therefore it was not likely to have any great efficacy upon the generality of mankind.

As for the jewish religion; tho' that supposed and took for granted the rewards of another world, as a principle of natural religion; yet in the law of Moses there was no particular and express revelation of the life of the world to come; and what was deduced from it, was by remote and obscure consequence. Temporal promises and threatnings it had many and clear, and their eyes were so dazzled with these, that it is probable that the generality of them did but little consider a future state, till they fell into great temporal calamities under the Grecian and Roman empires, whereby they were almost necessarily awakened to the consideration and hopes of a better life, to relieve them under their present evils and sufferings; and yet even in that time they were divided into two great factions about this matter, the one affirming, and the other as confidently denying any life after this. But "the gospel hath brought life and immortality to light," as we are assured from heaven of the truth and reality of another state, and a future judgment. The SON of GOD was sent into the world to preach this doctrine, and rose again from the dead, and was taken up into heaven, for a visible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this, and consequently of a future judgment, which no man ever doubted of, that did firmly believe a future state.

The sum of all that I have said is this; the gospel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to salvation is by forsaking our sins, and living a holy and

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The sum of all that I have said is this; the gospel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to salvation is by forsaking our sins, and living a holy and

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and virtuous life; and the most effectual argument in the world to persuade men to this, is the consideration of the infinite danger that a sinful course exposeth men to, since the wrath of God continually hangs over sinners, and if they continue in their sins, will certainly fall upon them, and overwhelm them with misery, and he that is not moved by this argument, is lost to all intents and purposes.

All that now remains, is to urge this argument upon men, and from the serious consideration of it, to persuade them to repent, and reform their wicked lives. And was there ever age wherein this was more needful? when iniquity doth not only abound, but even rage among us; when infidelity and profaneness, and all manner of lewdness and vice appears so boldly and openly, and men commit the greatest abominations without blushing at them; when vice hath got such head that it can hardly bear to be check'd and controll'd, and when, as the Roman historian complains of his times, *ad ea tempora, quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus, perventum est*; "things are come to that pass, that we can neither bear our vices, nor the remedies of them." Our vices are grown to a prodigious and intolerable height, and yet men hardly have the patience to hear of them; and surely a disease is then dangerous indeed, when it cannot bear the severity that is necessary to a cure. But yet, notwithstanding this, we who are the messengers of God to men, to warn them of their sin and danger, must not keep silence, and spare to tell them both of their sins, and of the judgment of God which hangs over them; that "God will visit for these things," and that "his soul will be avenged on such a nation as this,"

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at least we may have leave to warn others, who are ^{SERM.} not yet "run to the same excess of riot, to save ^{CXII.} themselves from this untoward generation."

"God's judgments are abroad in the earth," and call aloud upon us, "to learn righteousness."

But this is but a small consideration, in comparison of the judgment of another world, which we who call our selves christians, do profess to believe, as one of the chief articles of our faith. The consideration of this should check and cool us in the heat of all our sinful pleasures; and that bitter irony of Solomon should cut us to the heart; "rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Think often and seriously on that time, wherein "the wrath of God," which is now "revealed against sin," shall be executed upon sinners; and if we believe this, we are strangely stupid and obstinate, if we be not moved by it. The assurance of this made St. Paul extremely importunate in exhorting men to avoid so great danger, 2 Cor. v. 10, 11. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of CHRIST, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good, or evil. Knowing therefore the terrors of the LORD, we persuade men." And if this ought to move us to take so great a care of others, much more of our selves. The judgment to come is a very amazing consideration, it is a fearful thing to hear of it, but it will be much more terrible to see it, especially to those whose guilt

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guilt must needs make them so heartily concern'd in the dismal consequences of it; and yet as sure as I stand, and you sit here, "this great and terrible day of the LORD will come, and who may abide his coming!" what will we do, when that day shall surprize us careless and unprepared! what unspeakable horror and amazement will then take hold of us! when "lifting up our eyes to heaven, we shall see the SON of man coming in the clouds of it, with power, and great glory;" when that powerful voice which shall pierce the ears of the dead shall ring through the world, "arise ye dead, and come to judgment;" when the mighty trumpet shall sound, and wake the sleepers of a thousand years, and summon the dispersed parts of the bodies of all men that ever lived, to rally together and take their place; and the souls and bodies of men which have been so long strangers to one another, shall meet and be united again, to receive the doom due to their deeds; what fear shall then surprize sinners, and how will they tremble at the presence of the great judge, and "for the glory of his majesty!" how will their consciences fly in their faces, and their own hearts condemn them, for their wicked and ungodly lives, and even prevent that sentence which yet shall certainly be past and executed upon them. But I will proceed no further in this argument, which hath so much of terror in it.

I will conclude my sermon, as Solomon doth his Ecclesiastes, chap. xii. 13, 14. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear GOD, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man; for GOD shall bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether

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“it be good, or whether it be evil.” To which I will only add that serious and merciful admonition of “a greater than Solomon,” I mean the great judge of the whole world, our blessed LORD and SAVIOUR, Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36. “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you at unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the SON of man :” to whom with the FATHER, and the HOLY GHOST, &c.

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Knowledge and practice necessary in religion.

J O H N xiii. 17.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

TWO things make up religion, the knowledge and the practice of it; and the first is wholly in order to the second; and God hath not revealed to us the knowledge of himself and his will, merely for the improvement of our understanding, but for the bettering of our hearts and lives; not to entertain our minds with the speculations of religion and virtue, but to form and govern our actions. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

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In which words, our blessed SAVIOUR does from a particular instance take occasion to settle a general conclusion; namely, that religion doth mainly consist in practice, and that the knowledge of his doctrine, without the real effects of it upon our lives, will bring no man to heaven. In the beginning of this chapter our great LORD and master, to testify his love to his disciples, and to give them a lively instance and example of that great virtue of humility, is pleased to condescend to a very low and mean office, such as was used to be performed by servants to their masters, and not by the master to his servants; namely, to wash their feet; and when he had done this, he asks them if they did understand the meaning of this strange action. “ Know ye what I have done unto you? ye call me master, and LORD, and ye say well, for so I am: if I then your LORD and master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one anothers feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than the LORD, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him; if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” As if he had said, this which I have now done, is easy to be understood, and so likewise are all those other christian graces and virtues, which I have heretofore by my doctrine and example recommended to you; but it is not enough to know these things, but ye must likewise do them. The end and the life of all our knowledge in religion, is to put in practice what we know. It is necessary indeed that we should know our duty, but knowledge alone will never bring us to that happiness, which religion designs to make

make us partakers of, if our knowledge have not its due and proper influence upon our lives. Nay, so far will our knowledge be from making us happy, if it be separated from the virtues of a good life, that it will prove one of the heaviest aggravations of our misery ; and it is as if he had said, “ if ye know “ these things, wo be unto you, if you do them “ not.”

From these words then, I shall observe these three things, which I shall speak but briefly to.

First, that the knowledge of God's will, and our duty, is necessary to the practice of it; “ if ye know “ these things ;” which supposeth that we must know our duty, before we can do it.

Secondly, that the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be, and too often are separated. This likewise the text supposeth, that men may know their duty, and yet not do it ; and that this is very frequent, which is the reason why our SAVIOUR gives this caution.

Thirdly, that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness ; “ if ye know these things, happy “ are ye if ye do them.” I begin with the

First of these, namely, that the knowledge of God's will and our duty, is necessary in order to the practice of it. The truth of this proposition is so clear and evident at first view, that nothing can obscure it, and bring it in question, but to endeavour to prove it ; and therefore instead of spending time in that, I shall take occasion from it, justly to reprove that preposterous course which is taken, and openly avowed and justified by some, as the safest and best way to make men religious, and to bring them to

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happiness; namely, by taking away from them the means of knowledge; as if the best way to bring men to do the will of God, were to keep men from knowing it. For what else can be the meaning of that maxim so current in the church of Rome, "that ignorance is the mother of devotion?" or of that strange and injurious practice of theirs of locking up from the people that great store-house and treasury of divine knowledge, "the holy scriptures," in an unknown tongue?

I know very well, that in justification of this hard usage of their people, it is pretended that knowledge is apt to puff men up, to make them proud and contentious, refractory and disobedient, and heretical, and what not? and particularly, that the free and familiar use of the holy scriptures permitted to the people, hath ministred occasion to the people of falling into great and dangerous errors, and of making great disturbance and divisions among christians. For answer to this pretence, I desire these four or five things may be considered.

First, that unless this be the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free use of the holy scriptures, there is no force in this reason; and if this be the proper and natural effect of this knowledge, then this reason will reach a great way farther, than those who make use of it are willing it should.

Secondly, that this is not the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from mens abuse of it; for which the thing itself is not to be taken away.

Thirdly, that the proper and natural effects and consequences of ignorance, are equally pernicious,
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and much more certain and unavoidable, than those which are accidentally occasion'd by knowledge.

Fourthly, that if this reason be good, it is much stronger for withholding the scriptures from the priests and the learned, than from the people.

Fifthly, that this danger was as great, and as well known in the apostles times, and yet they took a quite contrary course.

First, I desire it may be consider'd that unless this be the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free use of the holy scriptures, there is no force in this reason; for that which is necessary, or highly useful, ought not to be taken away, because it is liable to be perverted, and abused to ill purposes. If it ought, then not only knowledge in religion, but all other knowledge ought to be restrained and suppress'd; for all knowledge is apt to puff up, and liable to be abused to many ill purposes. At this rate, light, and liberty, and reason, yea and life it self, ought all to be taken away, because they are all greatly abused by many men, to some ill purposes or other, so that unless these ill effects do naturally and necessarily spring from knowledge in religion, the objection from them is of no force; and if they do necessarily flow from it, then this reason will reach a great way farther than those that make use of it are willing it should; for if this be true, that the knowledge of religion, as it is revealed in the holy scriptures, is of its own nature so pernicious, as to make men proud and contentious and heretical, and disobedient to authority, then the blame of all this would fall upon our blessed SAVIOUR, for revealing so pernicious a doctrine and upon his apostles for publishing

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lishing this doctrine in a known tongue to all mankind, and thereby laying the foundation of perpetual schisms and heresies in the church.

Secondly, but this is not the natural and necessary effect of knowledge in religion, but only accidental, and proceeding from mens abuse of it, for which the thing it self ought not to be taken away. And thus much certainly they will grant, because it cannot with any face be denied; and if so, then the means of knowledge are not to be denied, but only men are to be cautioned not to pervert and abuse them. And if any man abuse the holy scriptures to the patronizing of error or heresy, or to any other bad purpose, he does it at his peril, and must give an account to GOD for it, but ought not to be deprived of the means of knowledge, for fear he should make an ill use of them. We must not hinder men from being christians, to preserve them from being hereticks; and put out mens eyes, for fear they should some time or other take upon them to dispute their way with their guides.

I remember that St. Paul, 1 Cor. viii. 1. takes notice of this accidental inconvenience of knowledge, that it puffeth up, and that this pride occasioned great contentions and divisions among them: but the remedy which he prescribes against this mischief of knowledge is not to withhold from men the means of it, and to celebrate the service of GOD, the prayers of the church, and the reading of the scriptures in an unknown tongue, but quite contrary, chap. xiv. of that epistle, he strictly enjoins that the service of GOD in the church be so performed, as may be for the edification of the people; which he says cannot be, if it be celebrated in an
unknown

unknown tongue; and the remedy he prescribes against the accidental mischief and inconvenience of knowledge, is not ignorance, but charity, to govern their knowledge, and to help them to make right use of it; ver. 20. of that chap. after he had declared that the service of God ought to be performed in a known tongue, he immediately adds, "brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men." He commends knowledge, he encourageth it, he requires it of all christians; so far is he from checking the pursuit of it, and depriving the people of the means of it. And indeed there is nothing in the christian religion, but what is fit for every man to know, because there is nothing in it, but what is designed to promote holiness and a good life; and if men make any other use of their knowledge, it is their own fault, for it certainly tends to make men good; and being so useful and necessary to so good a purpose, men ought not to be debarr'd of it.

Thirdly, let it be consider'd, that the proper and natural effects and consequences of ignorance are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than those which are accidentally occasioned by knowledge; for so far as a man is ignorant of his duty, it is impossible he should do it. He that hath the knowledge of religion, may be a bad christian, but he that is destitute of it, can be none at all. Or if ignorance do beget and promote some kind of devotion in men, it is such a devotion as is not properly religion, but superstition; the ignorant man may be zealously superstitious, but without some measure of knowledge, no man can be truly

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truly religious. "That the soul be without knowledge it is not good," says Solomon, Prov. xix. 2. because good practices depend upon our knowledge, and must be directed by it; when as a man that is trained up only to the outward performance of some things in religion, as to the saying over so many prayers in an unknown tongue, this man cannot be truly religious, because nothing is religious, that is not a reasonable service; and no service can be reasonable, that is not directed by our understanding. Indeed, if the end of prayer were only to give God to understand what we want, it were all one what language we prayed in, and whether we understood what we asked of him or not: but so long as the end of prayer is to testify the sense of our own wants, and of our dependence upon God for the supply of them, it is impossible that any man should in any tolerable propriety of speech be said to pray, who does not understand what he asks; and the saying over so many *pater nosters* by one that does not understand the meaning of them, is no more a prayer, than the repeating over so many verses in Virgil. And if this were good reasoning, that men must not be permitted to know so much as they can in religion, for fear they should grow troublesome with their knowledge, then certainly the best way in the world to maintain peace in the christian church, would be to let the people know nothing at all in religion; and the best way to secure the ignorance of the people would be to keep the priests as ignorant as the people, and then to be sure they could teach them nothing: but then the mischief would be, that out of a fondness to maintain peace in the christian church, there would be no church, nor no christianity;

Christianity; which would be the same wise contrivance, as if a prince should destroy his subjects, to keep his kingdom quiet. SERM. CXIII.

Fourthly, let us likewise consider, that if this reason be good, it is much stronger for withholding the scriptures from the priests, and the learned, than from the people; because the danger of starting errors and heresies, and countenancing them from scripture, and managing them plausibly and with advantage, is much more to be feared from the learned, than from the common people; and the experience of all ages hath shewn, that the great broachers and abettors of heresy in the christian church, have been men of learning and wit; and most of the famous heresies, that are recorded in ecclesiastical history, have their names from some learned man or other; so that it is a great mistake to think that the way to prevent error and heresy in the church, is to take the bible out of the hands of the people, so long as the free use of it is permitted to men of learning and skill, in whose hands the danger of perverting it is much greater. The ancient fathers, I am sure, do frequently prescribe to the people the constant and careful reading of the holy scriptures, as the surest antidote against the poison of dangerous errors, and damnable heresies; and if there be so much danger of seduction into error from the oracles of truth, by what other or better means can we hope to be secured against this danger? if the word of God be so cross and improper a means to this end, none would think that the teachings of men should be much less effectual; so that men must either be left in their ignorance, or they must be permitted to learn from the word of truth; and whatever

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force this reason of the danger of heresy hath in it, to deprive the common people of the use of the scriptures, I am sure it is much stronger to wrest them out of the hands of the priests and the learned, because they are much more capable of perverting them to so bad a purpose.

Fifthly, and lastly, this danger was as great and visible in the age of the apostles, as it is now; and yet they took a quite contrary course: there were heresies then, as well as now, and either the scriptures were not thought by being in the hands of the people to be the cause of them, or they did not think the taking of them out of their hands a proper remedy. The apostles in all their epistles, do earnestly exhort the people "to grow in knowledge," and commend them for "searching the scriptures", and charge them that "the word of God should dwell richly in them." And St. Peter takes particular notice of some men wresting some difficult passages in St. Paul's epistles, as likewise in the other scriptures, to their own destruction, 2 Pet. iii. 16. where speaking of St. Paul's epistles, he says, "there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction." Here the danger objected is taken notice of; but the remedy prescribed by St. Peter, is not to take from the people the use of the scriptures, and to keep them in ignorance; but after he had cautioned against the like weakness and errors, he exhorts them to "grow in knowledge," ver. 17, 18. "ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before" (that is, seeing ye are so plainly told and warned of this danger) "beware lest ye also being led away with

with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST," (that is, of the christian religion;) believing, it seems, that the more knowledge they had in religion, the less they would be in danger of falling into damnable errors. I proceed to the

Second observation, viz. that the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may and often are separated. This likewise is supposed in the text, that men may, and often do know the will of God, and their duty, and yet fail in the practice of it. Our SAVIOUR elsewhere supposeth, that many "know their master's will, who do not do it;" and he compares those "that hear his sayings, and do them not, to a foolish man that built his house upon the sand." And St. James speaks of some, "who are hearers of the word only, but not doers of it," and for that reason fall short of happiness. And this is no wonder, because the attaining to that knowledge of religion which is necessary to salvation is no difficult task. A great part of it is written in our hearts, and we cannot be ignorant of it if we would; as that there is a God, and a providence, and another state after this life, wherein we shall be rewarded, or punished, according as we have lived here in this world; that God is to be worshipped, to be prayed to for what we want, and to be praised for what we enjoy. Thus far nature instructs men in religion, and in the great duties of morality, as justice, and temperance, and the like. And as for revealed religion, as that JESUS CHRIST the SON of God came in our nature to save us, by revealing our duty more clearly and fully to us, by giving us a

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more perfect example of holiness and obedience in his own life and conversation, and by dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification ; these are things which men may easily understand ; and yet for all that they are difficultly brought to the practice of religion.

I shall instance in three sorts of persons, in whom the knowledge of religion is more remarkably separated from the practice of it ; and for distinction sake, I may call them by these three names ; the speculative, the formal, and the hypocritical christian. The first of these makes religion only a science, the second takes it up for a fashion, the third makes some worldly advantage of it, and serves some secular interest and design by it. All these are upon several accounts concerned to understand something of religion ; but yet will not be brought to the practice of it.

The first of these, whom I call the speculative christian, is he who makes religion only a science, and studies it as a piece of learning, and part of that general knowledge in which he affects the reputation of being a master ; he hath no design to practise it, but he is loth to be ignorant of it, because the knowledge of it is a good ornament of conversation, and will serve for discourse and entertainment among those who are disposed to be grave and serious ; and because he does not intend to practise it, he passeth over those things which are plain and easy to be understood, and applies himself chiefly to the consideration of those things which are more abstruse, and will afford matter of controversy and subtle dispute, as the doctrine of the trinity, predestination, free-will, and the like. Of this temper seem many of the schoolmen of old to have been, who made it their great study and business to puzzle religion, and to make

make every thing in it intricate, by starting infinite questions and difficulties about the plainest truths ; and of the same rank usually are the heads and leaders of parties and factions in religion, who by needless controversies, and endless disputes about some thing or other, commonly of no great moment in religion, hinder themselves and others from minding the practice of the great and substantial duties of a good life.

Secondly, there is the formal christian, who takes up religion for a fashion. He is born and bred in a nation where christianity is profest, and countenanced, and therefore thinks it convenient for him to know something of it. Of this sort there are, I fear, a great many, who read the scriptures sometimes as others do, to know the history of it ; and go to church, and hear the gospel preached, and by this means come in some measure to understand the history of our SAVIOUR, and the christian doctrine ; but do not at all bend themselves to comply with the great end and design of it ; they do not heartily endeavour to form and fashion their lives according to the laws and precepts of it ; they think they are very good christians, if they can give an account of the articles of their faith, profess their belief in GOD and CHRIST, and declare that they hope to be saved by him, tho' they take no care to keep his commandments. These are they of whom our SAVIOUR speaks, Luke vi. 46. " who call him LORD, " LORD, but do not the things which he said."

Thirdly, hypocritical christians, who make an interest of religion, and serve some worldly design by it. These are concerned to understand religion more than ordinary, that they may counterfeit it handsomely, and may not be at a loss when they have occasion

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occasion to put on the garb of it. And this is one part of the character which the apostle gives of those persons, who he foretels would appear in the last days, 2 Tim. iii. 2. he says they should be “lovers of their own selves, covetous, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it.”

Now these men do not love religion, but they have occasion to make use of it; and therefore they will have no more of it than will just serve their purpose and design. And indeed he that hath any other design in religion than to please God, and save his soul, needs no more than so much knowledge of it, as will serve him to act a part in it upon occasion. I come to the

Third and last observation, viz. that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness; “if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them;” not “if ye know these things happy are ye;” but “if ye know and do them.” Now to convince men of so important a truth, I shall endeavour to make out these two things:

First, that the gospel makes the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness.

Secondly, that the nature and reason of the thing makes it a necessary qualification for it.

First, the gospel make the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness. Our SAVIOUR in his first sermon, where he repeats the promise of blessedness so often, makes no promise of it to the mere knowledge of religion, but to the habit and practice of christian graces and virtues, of meekness,

ness, and humility, and mercifulness, and righteousness, and peaceableness, and purity, and patience under sufferings and persecutions for righteousness sake. And Matth. vii. 21. our SAVIOUR doth most fully declare, that the happiness which he promises, did not belong to those who made profession of his name, and were so well acquainted with his doctrine, as to be able to instruct others, if themselves in the mean time did not practise it; “not every one
“that saith unto me, LORD, LORD, shall enter into
“the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the
“will of my FATHER which is in heaven. Many
“will say unto me in that day, LORD, LORD,
“have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy
“name cast out devils, and done many wondrous
“works? and then will I profess unto them, I never
“knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniqui-
“ty.” Tho’ they profess to know him, yet be-
cause their lives were not answerable to the knowledge
which they had of him, and his doctrine, he declares
that “he will not know them,” but bids them
“depart from him.” And then he goes on to shew,
that tho’ a man attend to the doctrine of CHRIST, and
gain the knowledge of it; yet if it do not descend
into his life, and govern his actions, all that man’s
hopes of heaven are fond and groundless; and only
that man’s hopes of heaven are well-grounded, who
knows the doctrine of CHRIST, and does it, ver. 24.
“whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth
“them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built
“his house upon a rock, and the rain descended,
“and the floods came, and the winds blew, and
“beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was
“founded upon a rock; and every one that hear-
“eth

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“ eth these sayings of mine, and doth them not,
“ shall be liken'd to a foolish man, who built his
“ house upon the sand, and the rain descended, and
“ the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon
“ that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Tho' a man had a knowledge of religion as great and perfect as that which Solomon had of natural things, “ large as the sand upon the sea-shore ;” yet all this knowledge, separated from practice, would be like the sand also in another respect, a weak foundation for any man to build his hopes of happiness upon.

To the same purpose St. Paul speaks, Rom. ii. 13. “ not the hearers of the law are just before God ; but the doers of the law shall be justified.” So likewise St. James, chap. i. 22. “ Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves ;” and ver. 25. “ Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty ” (that is, the law or doctrine of the gospel) “ and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed ;” and therefore he adds, that the truth and reality of religion are to be measured by the effects of it, in the government of our words, and ordering of our lives, ver. 26. “ If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the FATHER is this ; to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Men talk of religion, and keep a great stir about it ; but nothing will pass for true religion before God, but the virtuous and charitable

charitable actions of a good life; and God will accept no man to eternal life upon any other condition. So the apostle tells us most expressly, Heb. xii. 14. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the LORD."

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Secondly, as God hath made the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness, so the very nature and reason of the thing makes it a necessary qualification for it. It is necessary that we become like to God, in order to the enjoyment of him; and nothing makes us like to God, but the practice of holiness and goodness. Knowledge indeed is a divine perfection; but that alone, as it doth not render a man like God, so neither doth it dispose him for the enjoyment of him. If a man had the understanding of an angel, he might for all that be a devil; "he that committeth sin is of the devil," and whatever knowledge such a man may have, he is of a devilish temper and disposition: "but every one that doth righteousness is born of God." By this we are like God, and only by our likeness to him, do we become capable of the sight and enjoyment of him; therefore every man that hopes to be happy by the blessed sight of God in the next life, must endeavour after holiness in this life. So the same apostle tells us, 1 John iii. 3. "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." A wicked temper and disposition of mind is, in the very nature of the thing, utterly inconsistent with all reasonable hopes of heaven.

Thus I have shewn that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness.

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And now the proper inference from all this is, to put men upon the careful practice of religion. Let no man content himself with the knowledge of his duty, unless he do it; and to this purpose I shall briefly urge these three considerations.

First, this is the great end of all our knowledge in religion, to practise what we know. The knowledge of God and of our duty hath so essential a respect to practice, that the scripture will hardly allow it to be properly called knowledge, unless it have an influence upon our lives. 1 John ii. 3, 4. "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Secondly, practice is the best way to increase and perfect our knowledge. Knowledge directs us in our practice, but practice confirms and increaseth our knowledge, John vii. 17. "If a man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine." The best way to know God, is to be like him ourselves, and to have the lively image of his perfections imprinted upon our souls; and the best way to understand the christian religion, is seriously to set about the practice of it; this will give a man a better notion of christianity, than any speculation can.

Thirdly, without the practice of religion, our knowledge will be so far from being any furtherance and advantage to our happiness, that it will be one of the unhappiest aggravations of our misery. He that is ignorant of his duty, hath some excuse to pretend for himself: but he that understands the christian religion, and does not live according to it, hath no cloke for his sin. The defects of our knowledge,

ledge, unless they be gross and wilful, will find an easy pardon with GOD: but the faults of our lives shall be severely punish'd, when we know our duty and would not do it. I will conclude with that of our SAVIOUR, Luke xii. 47, 48. "That servant which knew his LORD's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." When we come into the other world, no consideration will sting us more, and add more to the rage of our torments than this, that we did wickedly, when we understood to have done better; and chose to make our selves miserable, when we knew so well the way to have been happy.

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Practice in religion necessary, in proportion to our knowledge.

LUKE xii. 47, 48.

And that servant which knew his LORD's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

IN prosecution of the argument which I handled in my last discourse, namely, that the knowledge of our duty, without the practice of it, will

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not bring us to happiness, I shall proceed to shew, that, if our practice be not answerable to our knowledge, this will be a great aggravation both of our sin and punishment.

And to this purpose, I have pitched upon these words of our LORD, which are the application of two parables, which he had delivered before, to stir up men to a diligent and careful practice of their duty, that so they may be in a continual readiness and preparation for the coming of their LORD. The first parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are represented as so many servants in a great family, from which the LORD is absent, and they being uncertain of the time of his return, should always be in a condition and posture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, Peter enquires of our SAVIOUR, whether he intended this only for his disciples, or for all? To which question our SAVIOUR returns an answer in another parable, which more particularly concerned them; who because they were to be the chief rulers and 'governors of his church, are represented by the stewards of a great family, ver. 42. "who
" then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his
" LORD shall make ruler over his household, to
" give them their portion of meat in due season?" If he discharge his duty, "blessed is he," but if he shall take occasion in his LORD's absence, to domineer over his fellow-servants, and riotously to waste his LORD's goods, his LORD when he comes will punish him after a more severe and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole, in the words of the text, "and that servant which
" knew

knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." As if he had said, and well say such a servant deserve so severe a punishment, who having such a trust committed to him, and knowing his lord's will so much better, yet does contrary to it; upon which our SAVIOUR takes occasion to compare the fault and punishment of those who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with those who are ignorant of it; "that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." And then he adds the reason and the equity of this proceeding, "for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

The words in general do allude to that law of the Jews, mentioned Deut. xxv. 2. where the judge is required to see the malefactor punish'd according to his fault, by a certain number of stripes; in relation to which known law among the Jews, our SAVIOUR here says, that "those who knew their lord's will, and did it not, should be beaten with many stripes: but those who knew it not, should be beaten with few stripes." So that there are two observations lie plainly before us in the words.

First, that the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing his duty, if he do it not, the greater will be his condemnation; "the servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared
" not

SERM. "not himself, neither did according to it, shall be
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Secondly, that ignorance is a great excuse of mens faults, and will lessen their punishment; "but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."

I shall begin with the latter of these first, because it will make way for the other; viz. that ignorance is a great excuse of mens faults, and will lessen their punishment; "he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."

For the clearing of this, it will be requisite to consider what ignorance it is which our SAVIOUR here speaks of; and this is necessary to be enquired into, because it is certain that there is some sort of ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another sort, which doth either not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, so that it must be a third sort, different from both these, which our SAVIOUR here means.

First, there is an ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is an absolute and invincible ignorance, when a person is wholly ignorant of the thing, which if he knew, he should be bound to do, but neither can nor could have help'd it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, he either had not the capacity, or wanted the means and opportunity of knowing it. In this case a person is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For GOD measures the faults of men by their wills, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt.

in proportion to our knowledge.

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guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conscious to himself that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do. Now if a man be simply and invincibly ignorant of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether involuntary; for the will hath nothing to do, where the understanding doth not first direct. And this is the case of children who are not yet come to the use of reason; for tho' they may do that which is materially a fault, yet it is none in them, because by reason of their incapacity, they are at present invincibly ignorant of what they ought to do. And this is the case likewise of idiots, who are under a natural incapacity of knowledge, and so far as they are so, nothing that they do is imputed to them as a fault. The same may be said of distracted persons, who are deprived either wholly, or at some times, of the use of their understandings: so far, and so long as they are thus deprived, they are free from all guilt; and to persons who have the free and perfect use of their reason, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are absolutely and invincibly ignorant. For instance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind, to believe in the Son of God, where he is sufficiently manifested and revealed to them; but those who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, shall not be condemned for this infidelity, because it is impossible they should "believe on him, of whom they never heard;" they may indeed be condemned upon other accounts, for sinning against the light of nature, and for not obeying "the law which was written in their hearts;" for what the apostle says of the revelation of the law,

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law, is as true of any other revelation of God, "as
" many as have sinned without law, shall also perish
" without law; and as many as have sinned under
" the law, shall be judged by the law," Rom. ii. 12.
In like manner, those who have sinned without the
gospel, (that is, who never had the knowledge of
it) shall not be condemned for any offence against
that revelation which was never made to them, but for
their violation of the law of nature; only they that
have sinned under the gospel, shall be judged by it.

Secondly, there is likewise another sort of ignorance, which either does not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, when men are not only ignorant, but choose to be so; that is, when they wilfully neglect those means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; such as Job speaks of, Job xxi. 14. "who say unto God depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And this sort of ignorance many among the Jews were guilty of, when our SAVIOUR came and preached to them, but they would not be instructed by him; "the light came among them, but they loved darkness rather than light," as he himself says of them; and as he says elsewhere of the pharisees, "they rejected the counsel of God against themselves," they wilfully shut their eyes against that light which offered it self to them; "they would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, that they might be converted, and healed." Now an ignorance in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuse at all in it. He that knew not his lord's will, because he would not know it, because he wilfully rejected the means of coming

to the knowledge of it, deserves to be beaten with ^{SERM.} as many stripes, as if he had known it; because he ^{CXIV.} might have known it, and would not. He that will not take notice of the king's proclamation, or will stop his ears when it is read, and afterwards offends against it, does equally deserve punishment with those who have read it, and heard it; and disobey'd it, because he was as grossly faulty in not knowing it; and there is no reason that any man's gross fault should be his excuse.

So that it is neither of these sorts of ignorance that our SAVIOUR means, neither absolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is grossly wilful and affected; for the first, men deserve not to be beaten at all, because they cannot help it; for the latter, they deserve not to be excused, because they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our SAVIOUR here speaks of such an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuse it; for he says of them, that "they knew not their lord's will," and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuse them from blame, nor exempt them from punishment, "but they should be beaten with few stripes." In the

Third place then, there is an ignorance which is in some degree faulty, and yet does in a great measure excuse the faults which proceed from it; and this is when men are not absolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in comparison of others, who have a far more clear and distinct knowledge of it; and though they do not grossly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet perhaps they

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do not make the best use they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better ; and therefore in comparison of others, who have far better means and advantages of knowing their lord's will, they may be said not to know it, tho' they are not simply ignorant of it, but only have a more obscure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance does in a great measure excuse such persons, and extenuate their crimes, in comparison of those who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their master's will ; and yet it does not free them from all guilt ; because they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had ; and perhaps if they had used more care and industry, they might have known their lord's will better. And this was the case of the heathens, who in comparison of those who enjoyed the light of the gospel, might be said not to have known their lord's will, tho' as to many parts of their duty, they had some directions from natural light, and their consciences did urge them to many things by the obscure apprehensions and hopes of a future reward, and the fear of a future punishment. But this was but a very obscure and uncertain knowledge, in comparison of the clear light of the gospel, which hath discovered to us our duty so plainly by the laws and precepts of it, and hath presented us with such powerful motives and arguments to obedience in the promises and threatnings of it. And this likewise is the case of many christians ; who either through the natural slowness of their understandings, or by the neglect of their parents and teachers, or other circumstances of their education, have had far less means and advantages of knowledge than others. God does not expect so much

much from those as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity, and advantages of knowledge; and when our LORD shall come to call his servants to an account, they shall be beaten with fewer stripes than others; they shall not wholly escape, because they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had less knowledge than others, by so much their punishment shall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it should be so, that men should be accountable according to what they have received, and that to whom less is given, less should be required at their hands. The scripture hath told us, "that God will judge the world in righteousness;" now justice does require, that in taxing the punishment of offenders, every thing should be considered, that may be a just excuse and extenuation of their crimes, and that accordingly their punishment should be abated. Now the greatest extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; so that so far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, so far he is excusable for the neglect of it: for every degree of ignorance takes off so much from the perverseness of the will; *Et nihil ardet in inferno, nisi propria voluntas*, "Nothing is punish'd in hell, but what is voluntary, and proceeds from our wills."

I do not intend this discourse for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is much more desirable, if we use it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault; if we be not wanting to ourselves, we may be much happier by our knowledge, than any man can be by his ignorance;

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for tho' ignorance may plead an excuse, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuse, than to have the best in the world ready at hand to plead for ourselves. Besides, that we may do well to consider, that ignorance is no where an excuse where it is cherish'd; so that it would be the vainest thing in the world for any man to foster it, in hopes thereby to excuse himself; for where it is wilful and chosen, it is a fault, and (as I said before) it is the most unreasonable thing in the world, that any man's fault should prove his excuse. So that this can be no encouragement to ignorance, to say that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them, whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is designed and chosen, it is wilful; and then no man can reasonably design to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuse for his faults, because then the ignorance is wilful, and whenever it is so, it ceaseth to be an excuse.

I the rather speak this, because ignorance hath had the good fortune to meet with great patrons in the world, and to be extoll'd, tho' not upon this account, yet upon another, for which there is less pretence of reason; as if it were the mother of devotion. Of superstition I grant it is, and of this we see plentiful proof, among those who are so careful to preserve and cherish it: but that true piety and devotion should spring from it, is as unlikely as that darkness should produce light. I do hope indeed, and charitably believe, that the ignorance in which some are detained by their teachers and governors, will be a real excuse, to as many of them as are otherwise honest and sincere; but I doubt not but the errors and faults which

which proceed from this ignorance, will lie heavy SERM.
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upon those who keep them in it. I proceed to
the

Second observation, that the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of God, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. "The servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes." "Which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself;" the preparation of our mind to do the will of God, whenever there is occasion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him; a will rightly disposed to obey God, tho' it be not brought into act, for want of opportunity, does not lose its reward: but when, notwithstanding we know our lord's will, there are neither of these, neither the act, nor the preparation and resolution of doing it, what punishment may we not expect?

The just God, in punishing the sins of men, proportions the punishment to the crime, and where the crime is greater, the punishment riseth; as amongst the Jews, where the crime is small, the malefactor was sentenced to "a few stripes;" where it was great, he was "beaten with many." Thus our SAVIOUR represents the great judge of the world dealing with sinners; according as their sins are aggravated, he will add to their punishment. Now after all the aggravations of sin, there is none that doth more intrinsically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, and that upon these three accounts.

First,

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First, because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it.

Secondly, because it is a great obligation upon us to the doing of it.

Thirdly, because the neglect of our duty in this case cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. I shall speak briefly to these three.

First, because the knowledge of God's will is so great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage of doing our duty, is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reason which our SAVIOUR adds here in the text, "for
" to whomsoever much is given, of them much
" will be required; and to whom men have com-
" mitted much, of him they will ask the more."

It was, no doubt, a great discouragement and disadvantage to the heathens, that they were so doubtful concerning the will of God, and in many cases left to the uncertainty of their own reason, by what way and means they might best apply themselves to the pleasing of him, and this discouraged several of the wisest of them from all serious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing, as to be mistaken about it. Others that were more naturally devout, and could not satisfy their consciences without some expressions of religion, fell into various superstitions, and were ready to embrace any way of worship which custom prescribed, or the fancies of men could suggest to them; and hence sprang all the stupid and barbarous idolatries of the heathens. For ignorance growing upon the world, that natural propensity which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worship of a deity, for want of certain direction, express it self in those foolish and abominable idolatries, which were practised among the heathens.

And

And is it not then a mighty advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of divine revelation? we have the will of God plainly discovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined, so that no man that is in any measure free from interest and prejudice, can easily mistake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of God plainly revealed to us, and such a character of him given, as is most suitable to our natural conceptions of a deity, as render him both awful and amiable; for the scripture represents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of sin, and a great lover of mankind; and we have the law and manner of his worship (so far as was needful) and the rules of a good life clearly exprest and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience of those laws, a plain discovery made to us of the endless rewards and punishments of another world. And is not this a mighty advantage to the doing of God's will, to have it so plainly declared to us, and so powerfully enforced upon us? so that our duty lies plainly before us; we see what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it; so that considering the advantage we have of doing God's will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcusable if we do it not.

Secondly, the knowledge of our LORD's will is likewise a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reason to oblige us more to do any thing, than to be fully assur'd that it is the will of God, and that it is the law of the great sovereign of the world, who is able to save, or to destroy? that it is the pleasure of him that made us,
and

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and who hath declared that he designs to make us happy, by our obedience to his laws? so that if we know these things to be the will of God, we have the greatest obligation to do them, whether we consider the authority of God, or our own interest, and if we neglect them, we have nothing to say in our own excuse. We know the law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it, and if after this we will transgress, there is no apology to be made for us. They have something to plead for themselves, who can say, that tho' they had some apprehension of some parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do some things, yet the different apprehensions of mankind about several of these things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them easy to be carried off from their duty, by the vicious inclinations of their own nature, and the tyranny of custom and example, and the pleasant temptations of flesh and blood; but had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from God, and had certainly known these things to be his will, this would have conquered and born down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or if it had not, would have stopt their mouths, and taken away all excuse from them. There is some colour in this plea, that in many cases they did not know certainly what the will of God was, but for us who own a clear revelation from God, and profess to believe it, what can we say for our selves, to mitigate the severity of God towards us; why he should not pour forth all his wrath, and execute upon us the fierceness of his anger?

Thirdly,

Thirdly, the neglect of GOD's will when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is solely in our wills, and the more wilful any sin is, the more heinously wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than if it proceed from meer obstinacy and perverseness; and if we know it to be our LORD's will, and do it not, we are guilty of the highest contempt of the greatest authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a small aggravation, to affront the great sovereign judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and despise them, when we know whose laws they are? will we provoke the LORD to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" we believe that it is GOD who said, "thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; thou shalt not hate, or oppress, or defraud thy brother in any thing; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self;" and will we notwithstanding venture to break these laws, knowing whose authority they are stamp't withal? After this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? what can we say for our selves, why any one of those many stripes which are threatned should be abated to us? *Ignosci aliquatenus ignorantie potest; contemptus veniam non habet*; "something may be pardoned to ignorance; but contempt can expect no forgiveness." He that strikes his prince, not knowing him to be so, hath something to say for himself, that tho' he did a disloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a disloyal mind: but

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he that first acknowledgeth him for his prince, and then affronts him, deserves to be prosecuted with the utmost severity, because he did it wilfully, and in meer contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it is the will of God which we go against, takes away all possible excuse from us; for nothing can be said, why we should offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to destroy us.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, represented to you the true ground and reason of the aggravation of those sins, which are committed against the clear knowledge of God's will, and our duty; because this knowledge is so great an advantage to the doing of our duty; so great an obligation upon us to it; and because the neglect of our LORD's will in this case, cannot be without great wilfulness, and a downright contempt of his authority.

And shall I now need to tell you, how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our LORD's will, and to prepare our selves to do according to it; to be always in a readiness and disposition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occasion and opportunity? and it concerns us the more, because we, in this age and nation, have so many advantages, above a great part of the world, of coming to the knowledge of our duty. We enjoy the clearest and most perfect revelation which God ever made of his will to mankind, and have the light of divine truth plentifully shed amongst us, by the free use of the holy scriptures, which is not a sealed book to us, but lies open to be read, and studied by us; this spiritual food is “rained
“down

down like manna round about our tents," and SERM. CXIV. every one may gather so much as is sufficient; we are not stinted; nor have the word of God given out to us in broken pieces, or mix'd and adulterated, here a lesson of scripture, and there a legend; but whole and entire, sincere and uncorrupt.

God hath not left us, as he did the heathens for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light; nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the Jews, in dark types and shadows: but hath made a clear discovery of his mind and will to us. The dispensation which we are under, hath no veil upon it, "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth; we are of the day, and of the light," and therefore it may justly be expected that we should "put off the works of darkness, and walk as children of the light." Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the sins committed against it, and when our Lord comes to pass sentence upon us, will add to the number of our stripes. Nay, if God should inflict no positive torment upon sinners; yet their own minds would deal most severely with them upon this account, and nothing will gall their consciences more than to remember against what slight they did offend. For herein lies the very nature and sting of all guilt to be conscious to our selves, "that we knew what we ought to have done, and did it not." The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before, will be pardonable, in comparison of ours. "The times of that ignorance God winked at: but now he commands all men every where to repent," Mankind had some excuse for their errors before, and

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GOD was pleased in a great measure to overlook them: but “ if we continue still in our sins, we have no “ cloke for them.” All the degrees of light which we enjoy, are so many talents committed to us by our LORD, for the improving whereof he will call us to a strict account; “ for unto whomsoever much “ is given, of him much shall be required; and to “ whom he hath committed much, of him he will “ ask the more.” And nothing is more reasonable, than that men should account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of GOD; and that as their knowledge was increased, so their sorrow and punishment should proportionably rise, if they sin against it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deservedly pitied and lamented by us, but the condemnation of none is so bad, as of those who having the knowledge of God’s will, neglected to do it; “ how much better had it “ been for them not to have known the way of “ righteousness, than after they have known it, to “ turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them!” If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, “ we “ had had no sin;” in comparison of what now we have: “ but now that we see, our sin remains.” This will aggravate our condemnation beyond measure, that we had the knowledge of salvation so clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us, we know what we ought to do, and “ what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness.” We believe the coming of our LORD to judgment, and we know not how soon he may be “ revealed from heaven with “ his mighty angels,” not only “ to take vengeance “ on

in proportion to our knowledge.

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“on them that know not God,” but on them that have known him, and yet “obey not the gospel of his Son.” And if all this will not move us to prepare our selves to do our LORD’s will, we deserve to have our stripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for those who offend against the clear knowledge of God’s will, and their duty.

Let us then be persuaded to set upon the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our understandings, descend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty, and “if our hearts condemn us not,” neither for the neglect of the means of knowledge, nor for rebelling against the light of God’s truth shining in our minds, and glaring upon our consciences, “then have we confidence towards God: but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.”

SERMON

[1898]

S E R M O N CXV.

The sins of men not chargeable upon
God ; but upon themselves.

J A M E S i. 13, 14.

*Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of
God ; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither
tempteth he any man : but every man is tempted,
when he is drawn away of his own lust, and en-
ticed.*

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The first
sermon on
this text.

NEXT to the belief a God, and his provi-
dence, there is nothing more fundamen-
tally necessary to the practice of a good
life, than the belief of these two principles, “ that
“ God is not the author of sin,” and “ that every
“ man’s sin lies at his own door, and he hath rea-
“ son to blame himself for all the evil that he
“ does.”

First, “ that God is not the author of sin,” that
he is no way accessary to our faults, either by tempt-
ing or forcing us to the commission of them. For
if he were, they would neither properly be sins, nor
could they be justly punished. They would not pro-
perly be sins, for sin is a contradiction to the will
of God ; but supposing men to be either tempted or
necessitated thereto, that which we call sin, would
either be a meer passive obedience to the will of God,
or an active compliance with it, but neither way a
contradiction to it. Nor could these actions be justly
punished ;

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unished; for all punishment supposeth a fault, and a fault supposeth liberty, and freedom from force and necessity; so that no man can be justly punished for that which he cannot help, and no man can help that which he is necessitated and compell'd to. And tho' there were no force in the case, but only temptation, yet it would be unreasonable for the same person to tempt and punish. For as nothing is more contrary to the holiness of God than to tempt men to sin; so nothing can be more against justice and goodness, than first to draw men into a fault, and then to chastise them for it. So that this is a principle which lies at the bottom of all religion, "that God is not the author of the sins of men." And then,

Secondly, "that every man's fault lies at his own door, and he has reason enough to blame himself for all the evil that he does." And this is that which makes men properly guilty, that when they have done amiss, they are conscious to themselves it was their own act, and they might have done otherwise; and guilt is that which makes men liable to punishment; and fear of punishment is the great restraint from sin, and one of the principal arguments for virtue and obedience.

And both these principles our apostle St. James does here fully assert in the words which I have read unto you. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

In which words, these two things are plainly contained.

First,

First, that God doth not tempt any man to sin.
 “ Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”

Secondly, that every man's fault lies at his own door, and he is his own greatest tempter. “ But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

I. That God doth not tempt any man to sin.
 “ Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”
 In which words, there are three things to be considered.

First, the proposition which the apostle here rejects, and that is, “ that God tempts men.” “ Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.”

Secondly, the manner in which he rejects it. “ Let no man say so.” By which manner of speaking, the apostle insinuates these two things. 1. That men are apt to lay their faults upon God: for when he says, “ let no man say so,” he intimates, that men are apt to say so, and it is very probable that some did say so; and, 2dly, that it is not only a fault, but an impious assertion to say that God tempts men. He speaks of it as a thing to be rejected with a detestation. “ Let no man say;” that is, far be it from us to affirm a thing so impious and dishonourable to God.

Thirdly, the reason and argument that he brings against it, “ for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”

First, the proposition which the apostle here rejects, SERM. CXV.
and that is, "that God tempts men:" "let no man

say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."

Now that we may the more distinctly understand the meaning of the proposition, which the apostle here rejects, it will be very requisite to consider what temptation is, and the several sorts and kinds of it. To tempt a man, is, in general, nothing else but to make trial of him in any kind what he will do. In scripture, temptation is commonly confin'd to the trial of a man's good or bad, of his virtuous or vicious inclinations. But then it is such a trial as endangers a man's virtue, and if he be not well resolved, is likely to overcome it, and to make him fall into sin. So that temptation does always imply something of danger the worst way. And men are thus tempted, either from themselves, or by others; by others chiefly these two ways.

First, by direct and downright persuasions to sin.

Secondly, by being brought into such circumstances as will greatly endanger their falling into it, tho' none solicit and persuade them to it.

First, by direct and downright persuasions to sin. Thus the devil tempted our first parents, by representing things so to them, as might on the one hand incite them to sin, and on the other hand weaken and loosen that which was the great curb and restraint from it. On the one hand he represents to them the advantages they should have by breaking God's command. "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." On

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the other hand, he represents the danger of offending not to be so great and certain as they imagined. " The serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die." And the devil had so good success in this way of tempting the first Adam, as to encourage him to set upon the second, our blessed SAVIOUR, in the same manner ; for he would have persuaded him " to fall down and worship him," by offering him " all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." And thus bad men many times tempt others, and endeavour to draw them into the same wicked courses with themselves. Solomon represents to us the manner and the danger of it, Prov. i, 10, 11, 13, 14. " My SON, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not ; if they say, come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause ; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in thy lot amongst us, let us all have one purse." This is the first way of temptation.

And to be sure GOD tempts no man this way. He offers no arguments to man to persuade him to sin ; he no where proposeth either reward or impunity to sinners ; but on the contrary gives all imaginable encouragement to obedience, and threatens the transgression of his law with most dreadful punishments.

Secondly, men are likewise tempted, by being brought into such circumstances, as will greatly endanger their falling into sin, tho' none persuade them to it ; and this happens two ways ; when men are remarkably beset with the allurements of the world, or assaulted with the evils and calamities of it ; for either of these conditions are great temptations

to men, and make powerful assaults upon them, especially when they fall upon those who are ill disposed before, or are but of a weak virtue and resolution.

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The allurements of the world are strong temptations; riches, and honours, pleasures, are the occasions and incentives to many lusts. Honour and greatness, power and authority over others, especially when men are suddenly lifted up, and from a low condition, are apt to transport men to pride and insolency towards others. Power is a strong liquor which does easily intoxicate weak minds, and make them apt to say and do indecent things.

“Man that is in honour and understands not, is like the beasts that perish;” intimating that men who are exalted to an high condition, are very apt to forget themselves, and to play the fools and beasts. It requires great consideration, and a well poised mind, not to be lifted up with one’s condition. Weak heads are apt to turn and grow dizzy, when they look down from a great height.

And so likewise ease and prosperity are a very slippery condition to most men, and without great care do endanger the falling into great sins. So Solomon observes, Prov. i. 32. “For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” For this reason Agur maketh his prayer to God, that he would “give him neither poverty nor riches,” but keep him in a mean condition, because of the danger of both extremes, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. “Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee.” Both the eager desire and the possession and enjoyment of riches do frequently prove fatal to men. So our SAVIOUR tells

SERM. us elsewhere very emphatically, Matth. xix. 23, 24.

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“ Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly
 “ enter into the kingdom of heaven: and again I
 “ say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through
 “ the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter
 “ into the kingdom of God.” St. Paul likewise very
 fully declares unto us the great danger of this condi-
 tion, 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. “ But they that will be rich
 “ fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many
 “ foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in
 “ destruction and perdition; for the love of money
 “ is the root of all evil, which while some coveted
 “ after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced
 “ themselves through with many sorrows.”

But the greatest bait of all to flesh and blood, is
 sensual pleasures; the very presence and opportunity
 of these, are apt to kindle the desires, and to in-
 flame the lusts of men, especially where these temp-
 tations meet with suitable tempers, where every
 spark that falls catcheth.

And on the other hand, the evils and calamities
 of this world, especially if they threaten or fall upon
 men in any degree of extremity, are strong temp-
 tations to humane nature. Poverty and want, pain
 and suffering, and the fear of any great evil, espe-
 cially of death, these are great straits to humane
 nature, and apt to tempt men to great sins, to im-
 patience and discontent, to unjust and dishonest shifts,
 to the forsaking of God, and apostasy from his truth
 and religion. Agur was sensible of the dangerous
 temptation of poverty, and therefore he prays against
 that, as well as against riches; “ give me not po-
 “ verty, lest being poor I steal, and take the name
 “ of the LORD my God in vain;” that is, lest I

be tempted to theft, and perjury. The devil, whose trade is to tempt men to sin, knew very well the force of these sorts of temptations, when he desires God first to touch Job in his estate, and to see what effect that would have, Job i. 11. "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." And when he found himself deceived in this, surely he thought, that were he but afflicted with great bodily pains, that would put him out of all patience, and flesh and blood would not be able to withstand this temptation, chap. ii. 5. "But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And this was the great temptation that the primitive christians were assaulted withal; they were tempted to forsake CHRIST and his religion, by a most violent persecution, by the spoiling of their goods, by imprisonment, and torture, and death. And this is that kind of temptation which the apostle particularly speaks of before the text, "blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the LORD hath promised to them that love him;" and then it follows, "let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." And thus I have given an account of the several sorts of temptations comprehended under this second head, namely, when men are tempted by being brought into such circumstances as do greatly endanger their falling into sin, by the allurements of this world, and by the evils and calamities of it.

And the question is, how far God hath an hand in these kind of temptations, that so we may know how to limit this proposition, which the apostle here rejects,

rejects, "that men are tempted of God." "Let
"no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted
"of God."

That the providence of God does order, or at least permit men to be brought into these circumstances I have spoken of, which are such dangerous temptations to sin, no man can doubt, that believes his providence to be concern'd in the affairs of the world. All the difficulty is, how far the apostle does here intend to exempt God from an hand in these temptations. Now for the clearer understanding of this, it will be requisite to consider the several ends and reasons, which those who tempt others may have in tempting them; and all temptation is for one of these three ends or reasons; either for the trial and improvement of mens virtues; or by way of judgment and punishment for some former great sins and provocations; or with a direct purpose and design to seduce men to sin; these I think are the chief ends and reasons that can be imagined, of exercising men with dangerous temptations.

First, for the exercise and improvement of mens graces and virtues. And this is the end which God always aims at, in bringing good men, or permitting them to be brought into dangerous temptations. And therefore St. James speaks of it as a matter of joy, when good men are exercised with afflictions; not because afflictions are desirable for themselves, but because of the happy consequences of them, ver. 2, 3, of this chapter, "My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." And to the same purpose St. Paul, Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. "We glory in tribulation, knowing

but upon themselves.

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ing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience
experience ;” δοκιμὴν patience trieth a man,
and this trial worketh hope, and hope maketh not
ashamed.” These are happy effects and conse-
quences of affliction and suffering, when they im-
prove the virtues of men and increase their graces,
and thereby make way for the increase of their glo-
ry. Upon this account St. James pronounceth those
blessed, who are thus tempted. “ Blessed is the man
that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he
shall receive the crown of life, which the LORD
hath promised to them that love him.”

And this certainly is no disparagement to the pro-
vidence of GOD, to permit men to be thus tempted,
when he permits it for no other end, but to make
them better men, and thereby to prepare them for a
greater reward : and so the apostle assures us, Rom.
ii. 17, 18. “ If so be we suffer with him, we shall
also be glorified with him ; for I reckon that the
sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be
compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”
and ver. 28. “ For we know that all things shall
work together for good to them that love GOD.”
and this happy end and issue of temptations to good
when the providence of GOD secures to them (if they
be not wanting to themselves) one of these two ways,
either by proportioning the temptation to their
strength ; or if it exceed that, by ministering new
strength and support to them, by the secret and ex-
traordinary aids of his HOLY SPIRIT.

First, by proportioning the temptation to their
strength ; ordering things so by his secret and wise
providence, that they shall not be assaulted by any
temptation, which is beyond their strength to resist
and

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and overcome. And herein the security of good men doth ordinarily consist; and the very best of us, those who have the firmest and most resolute virtue were in infinite danger, if the providence of God did not take this care of us. For a temptation may set upon the best men with so much violence, or surprize them at such an advantage, as no ordinary degree of grace and virtue is able to withstand: but where men are sincerely good, and honestly resolved, the providence of God doth ward off these fierce blows, and put by these violent thrusts, and by a secret disposal of things keep them from being assaulted by these irresistible kinds of temptations.

The consideration whereof, as it is a great encouragement to men to be sincerely good, so likewise a great argument for a continual dependence upon the providence of God, and to take us off from confidence in our selves, and our own strength. And this use the apostle makes of it, 1 Cor. x. 12. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth," (that is confident that nothing shall be able to shake him, or throw him down) "take heed lest he fall: "there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men; *ἐν μὴ ἀνθρώπινον*, but what is humane;" nothing but what an humane strength assisted by an ordinary grace of God, may be able to resist and conquer. But there are greater and more violent temptations than these, which you have not yet been tried with; and when those happen, we must have recourse to God for an extraordinary assistance. And this is the

Second way I mention'd, whereby the providence of God does secure good men in case of extraordinary temptations, which no humane strength can probably

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probably resist. And this the same apostle assures of in the very next words, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." That is, in case of great and violent temptations (such as the christians in the height of their persecutions were exposed to) God will secretly minister strength and support equal to the force and power of the temptation. And this God did in an extraordinary manner to the christian martyrs, and at to such a degree, as made them joyfully to embrace their sufferings, and with the greatest cheerfulness in the world to endure those torments, which no humane patience was able to bear. And where God doth thus secure men against temptations, or support them under them, it is no reflexion at all upon the goodness or justice of his providence, to permit them to be thus tempted.

Secondly, God permits others to be thus tempted, by way of judgment and punishment for some former great sins and provocations which they have been guilty of. And thus many times God punisheth great and notorious offenders, by permitting them to fall into great temptations, which meeting with a vicious disposition, are likely to be too hard for them, especially considering how by a long habit of wickedness, and wilful commission of great and notorious sins, they have made themselves an easy prey to every temptation, and have driven the SPIRIT of God from them, and deprived themselves of those aids and restraints of his grace, which he ordinarily bestows, not only to good men, but likewise to

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those

those who are not very bad. And thus God is said to have "harden'd Pharaoh" by those plagues and judgments which he sent upon him and his kingdom. But if we carefully read the story, it is said that "he first harden'd himself" and then that "God harden'd him;" that is, he being harden'd under the first judgments of God, God sent more, which meeting with his obstinacy, had this natural effect upon him, to harden him yet more; not that God did infuse any wickedness or obstinacy into him, but by his just judgments sent more plagues upon him, which hardened him yet more, and which were likely to have that effect upon him, considering the ill temper of the man. And it was just by way of punishment that they should. And so likewise Joshua xi. 19, 20. it is said that the cities of the Canaanites did not make peace with Joshua, because "it was of the LORD to harden their hearts" "that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly;" that is, for their former iniquities, the measure whereof was now full, the providence of God did justly bring them into and leave them under those circumstances, which made them obstinate against all terms of peace, and this proved fatal to them.

And in the like sense we are to understand several other expressions in scripture, which likewise might seem very harsh. As Isaiah vi. 10. "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy" "and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes" "and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert and be healed;" which expressions signify no more, but that God, for the former provocations and impenitency of the people

people, did leave them to their own hardness and blindness, so that they did not desire to understand and make use of the means of their recovery. So likewise, Rom. i. 24. God is said to have given up the idolatrous heathen "to uncleanness, to vile and unnatural lusts;" and ver. 28. "to a reprobate and injudicious mind;" that is, as a punishment of their idolatry, he left them to the power of those temptations, which betrayed them to the vilest lusts. And to mention but one text more, 2 Thess. ii. 11. the apostle threatens those that rejected the truth, that "for this cause God would send them strong delusions (the efficacy of error) that they should believe a lye, and that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness;" that is, as a just punishment for their denouncing the truth, God gave them over to the power of delusion; their error had its full scope at them, to tempt them with all its colours and preferences.

But it is observable, that, in all these places which have mention'd, God is said to give men up to the power of temptation, as a punishment of some former great crimes and provocations. And it is not unjust with God thus to deal with men, to leave them to the power of temptation, when they had first wilfully forsaken him; and in this case God both not tempt men to sin, but leaves them to themselves, to be tempted by their own hearts lusts; and if they yield and are conquered, it is their own fault, because they have neglected God's grace, whereby they might have been able to have resisted those temptations; and have forced his HOLY SPIRIT to withdraw himself from them, and to leave

them open and naked to those assaults of temptation, against which they might otherwise have been sufficiently armed.

Thirdly, the last end of temptation which I mentioned, is to try men, with a direct purpose and intention to seduce men to sin. Thus wicked men tempt others, and thus the devil tempts men. Thus he tempted our first parents, and seduced them from their obedience and allegiance to God. Thus he tempted Job, by bringing him into those circumstances, which were very likely to have forc'd him into impatience and discontent. And thus he tempted our blessed SAVIOUR; but found nothing in him to work upon, or to give him any advantage over him. And thus he daily tempts men, by laying all sorts of baits and snares before them, "going about continually, seeking whom he may seduce and destroy;" and as far as God permits him, and his power reacheth, he suits his temptations as near as he can to the humours and appetites and inclinations of men, contriving them into such circumstances, as that he may ply his temptations upon them to the greatest advantage; propounding such objects to them, as may most probably draw forth the corruptions of men, and kindle their irregular desires, and inflame their lusts, and tempt their evil inclinations that way, which they are most strongly bent. He tempts the covetous man with gain, the ambitious man with preferment, the voluptuous man with carnal and sensual pleasures; and where none of these baits will take, he stirs up his instruments to persecute those, who are stedfast and confirmed in resolutions of piety and virtue, to try if he can work upon their fear, and shake their constancy and

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delity to God and goodness that way ; and all that
doth with a direct design and earnest desire to
seduce men from their duty, and to betray them
to sin.

But thus " God tempts no man," and in this
sense it is that the apostle means, that " no man
when he is tempted, is tempted of God." God
hath no design to seduce any man to sin. He
often proves the obedience of men, and suffers them
to " fall into divers temptations, for the trial of
their faith," and exercise of their obedience and
other virtues, and he permits bad men to be assaulted
with great temptations, and as a punishment of
their former obstinacy and impiety, withdraws the
aids and assistances of his grace from them, and
leaves them to their own weakness and folly ; but
not so as to take away all restraint of his grace even
from bad men, unless it be upon very high provo-
cation, and a long and obstinate continuance in sin :
but God never tempts any man, with any intention
to seduce him to sin, and with a desire he should do
wickedly. This is the proper work of the devil and
his instruments ; in this sense it is far from " God
to tempt any man ;" and whenever in the ordi-
nary course, and by the common permission of his
providence, men " fall into temptation," the ut-
most that God does, is " to leave them to them-
selves ;" and he does not do this neither, but to
those who have highly provoked him to depart
from them, that is, to those who have justly de-
served to be so dealt withal.

And thus I have consider'd the proposition which
the apostle here rejects, namely, " that God tempts
men," and have shewn as clearly as I can, how it

is

is to be limited and understood. I now proceed to the second thing which I propounded to consider, viz. the manner in which the apostle rejects this proposition, “let no man say when he is “tempted, I am tempted of God.” By which manner of speaking, he insinuates two things.

First, that men are apt to lay their faults upon God. For when he says, “let no man say so,” he intimates that men were apt to say thus ; and ’tis probable some did say so, to excuse themselves for their deserting their religion upon the temptation of persecution and suffering. ’Tis not unlikely that men might lay the fault upon God’s providence, which expose them to these difficult trials, and thereby tempted them to forsake their religion.

But however this be, we find it very natural to men, to transfer their faults upon others. Men are naturally sensible when they offend, and do contrary to their duty ; and the guilt of sin is an heavy burden, of which men would be glad to ease themselves as much as they can ; and they think it a mitigation and excuse of their faults if they did not proceed only from themselves, but from the violence and compulsion, the temptation and instigation of others. But especially men are very glad to lay their faults upon God, because he is a full and sufficient excuse, nothing being to be blamed that comes from him. Thus Adam did, upon the commission of the very first sin that mankind was guilty of. When God charged him for breaking of his law, by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, he endeavours to excuse himself by laying the fault obliquely upon God ; “the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” “The woman

“man whom thou gavest to be with me;” he does what he can to derive the fault upon God. And though his be very unreasonable, yet it seems it is very natural. Men would fain have the pleasure of committing sin, but then they would be glad to remove as much of the trouble and guilt of it from themselves as they can.

Secondly, this manner of speech, which the apostle here useth, doth insinuate farther to us, that it is not only a false, but an impious assertion to say that God tempts men to sin. He speaks of it, not as a thing unfit to be said, but fit to be rejected with the greatest indignation; “let no man say,” that is, far be it from us to affirm any thing so impious and so dishonourable to God. For nothing can be more contrary to the holy and righteous nature of God, and to those plain declarations which he hath made of himself, than to seduce men to wickedness; and therefore no man, that hath any regard to the honour of God, can entertain the least suspicion of his having any hand in the sins of men, or give heed to any principles or doctrines, from whence so odious and abominable a consequence may be drawn. I proceed to the

Third thing I propounded to consider, viz. the reason or argument which the apostle brings against this impious suggestion; “that God cannot be tempted with evil,” and therefore no man can imagine that he should tempt any man to it; “let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” And in speaking to this, I shall First, consider the strength and force of this argument; and

Secondly,

Secondly, the nature and kind of it.

First, the strength and force of this argument, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" ἀπειρασθε ὑπὸ κακῶν, "he is untemptible by evil;" he cannot be drawn to any thing that is bad himself, and therefore it cannot be imagined he should have any inclination or design to seduce others. And this will appear to be a strong and forcible argument, if we consider, First, the proposition upon which it is grounded, "that God cannot be tempted by evil."

Secondly, the consequence that clearly follows from it; and that is, that because God cannot be tempted by evil, therefore "he cannot tempt any man to it."

First, we will consider the proposition upon which this argument is built, and that is, "that God cannot be tempted by evil." He is out of the reach of any temptation to evil. Whoever is tempted to any thing, is either tempted by his own inclination, or by the allurements of the object, or by some external motive and consideration: but none of all these can be imagined to have any place in God, to tempt him to evil.

For, first, he hath no temptation to it from his own inclination. The holy and pure nature of God is at the greatest distance from evil, and at the greatest contrariety to it. He is so far from having any inclination to evil, that it is the only thing in the world to which he hath an irreconcilable antipathy. This the scripture frequently declares to us, and that in a very emphatical manner, Psal. v. 4. "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him." The words are a diminution,

diminution, and less is said, than is intended by them; the meaning is, that God is so far from taking pleasure in sin, that he hath a perfect hatred and abhorrence of it. Hab. ii. 13. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity." As when men hate a thing to the highest degree, they turn away their eyes, and cannot endure to look upon it. Light and darkness are not more opposite to one another, than the holy nature of God is to sin. "What fellowship hath light with darkness, or God with Belial?"

Secondly, there is no allurement in the object, to stir up any inclination in him towards it. Sin in its very nature is imperfection, and irregularity, crookedness, and deformity; so that unless there be an inclination to it beforehand, there is nothing in it to move any one's liking or desire towards it; it hath no attractives or enticements in it, but to a corrupt and ill-disposed mind.

Thirdly, neither are there external motives and considerations, that can be imagined to tempt God to it. All arguments that have any temptation, are either founded in hope or in fear; either in the hope of gaining some benefit or advantage, or in the fear of falling into some mischief or inconvenience. Now the divine nature being perfectly happy, and perfectly secured in its own happiness, is out of the reach of any of these temptations. Men are many times tempted to evil very strongly by these considerations; they want many things to make them happy, and they fear many things which may make them miserable; and the hopes of the one and the fears of the other, are apt to work very

powerfully upon them, to seduce them from their duty, and to draw them to sin: but the divine nature is firm against all these attempts, by its own fulness and security. So that you see now the proposition, upon which the apostle grounds his argument, is evidently true, and beyond all exception, "that GOD cannot be tempted with evil." Let us then in the

Second place, consider the consequence that clearly follows from it, that because GOD cannot be tempted with evil, "therefore he cannot tempt any man to it." For why should he desire to draw men into that, which he himself abhors, and which is so contrary to his own nature and disposition? when men tempt one another to sin, they do it to make others like themselves; and when the devil tempts men to sin, it is either out of direct malice to GOD, or out of envy to men. But none of these considerations can have any place in GOD, or be any motive to him to tempt men to sin.

Bad men tempt others to sin, to make them like themselves, and that with one of these two designs: either for the comfort or pleasure of company, or for the countenance of it, that there may be some kind of apology and excuse for them.

For the comfort and pleasure of company. Man does not love to be alone; and for this reason bad men endeavour to make others like themselves, that agreeing with them in the same disposition and manners, they may be fit company for them. For no man takes pleasure in the society and conversation of those, who are of contrary tempers and inclinations to them, because they are continually warring and clashing with one another. And for this reason bad

men hate and persecute those that are good. "Let SER M. CXV.
us lie in wait (say they) for the righteous, because
he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our
doings; he is grievous unto us even to behold;
for his life is not like other mens, and his ways
are of another fashion;" as it is exprest in the
Wisdom of Solomon. So that wicked men tempt
others to sin, that they may have the pleasure and
contentment of their society. But now for this rea-
son God cannot be imagined to tempt men to sin;
because that would be the way to make them un-
like himself, and such as his soul could take no
pleasure in.

Another design that bad men have in seducing
others to sin, is thereby to give countenance to their
bad actions, and to be some kind of excuse and
apology for them. Among men, the multitude of
offenders does sometimes procure impunity, but it
always gives countenance to vice; and men are apt
to alledge it in their excuse, that they are not alone
guilty of such a fault, that they did not do it without
company and example; which is the reason of that
law, Exod. xxiii. 2. "Thou shalt not follow a mul-
titude to do evil;" implying, that men are very
apt to take encouragement to any thing that is bad,
from company and example. But neither hath this
reason any place in God, who being far from doing
evil himself, can have no reason to tempt others to
do so, by way of excuse, and vindication of him-
self.

And when the devil tempts men to sin, it is either
out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men.
Out of malice to God, to spoil his workmanship,
and to pervert that which came innocent and upright

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out of his hands; to rob GOD of his subjects, and to debauch them from their duty and allegiance to him; to strengthen the rebellion which he has raised against God, and to make him as many enemies as he can. But for this end GOD cannot tempt any man; for this would be to procure dishonour to himself, and to deface the work of his own hands.

Another reason why the devil tempts men, is envy. When he was fallen from GOD, and happiness, and by his own rebellion had made himself miserable, he was discontented to see the happy condition of man, and it grieved him at his very heart; and this moved him to tempt man to sin, that he might involve him in the same misery into which he had plunged himself. It is a pleasure to envy to overturn the happiness of others, and to lay them level with themselves. But the divine nature is full of goodness, and delights in the happiness of all his creatures. His own incomparable felicity has placed him as much above any temptation to envying others, as above any occasion of being contemned by them. He grudges no man's happiness, and therefore cannot tempt men to sin, out of a desire to see them miserable. So that none of those considerations which move the devil to tempt men to sin, and evil men to tempt one another to do wickedly, can be imagined to have any place in GOD.

And thus you see the force of the apostle's argument, that because "GOD cannot be tempted to evil," therefore "he can tempt no man." None tempt others to be bad, but those who are first so themselves. I shall now in the

Second place, consider the nature and kind of the argument, which the apostle here useth, "let no man

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say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." It does not reject this ingenious proposition barely upon his own authority; but he argues against it from the nature and perfection of God; and therein appeals to the common notion of mankind concerning God. We might very well have rested in his authority, being an apostle commissioned by our SAVIOUR, and extraordinarily assisted and witnessed to, by the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, wherewith he was endowed. But he condescends to give a reason of what he says, and appeals to the common principles of mankind. For all men will readily agree to this, "that God hath all imaginable perfection:" but it is a plain imperfection to be liable to be tempted to evil, and therefore "God cannot be tempted to evil." And if so, it is as impossible "that he should tempt others to it;" for none can have either an inclination or interest to seduce others to evil, but those who have been first seduced to it themselves.

Now in this method of arguing, the apostle teacheth us one of the surest ways of reasoning in religion; namely, from the natural notions which men have of God. So that all doctrines plainly contrary to those natural notions which men have of God, are to be rejected, what authority soever they pretend to; whatever plainly derogates from the goodness or justice of God, or any other of his perfections, is certainly false, what authority soever it may claim from the judgment of learned and pious men; yea tho' it pretend to be countenanced from the texts and expressions of holy scripture. Because

cause nothing can be entertain'd as a divine revelation, which plainly contradicts the common natural notions which mankind have of God. For all reasoning about divine revelation, and whether that which pretends to be so, be really so or not, is to be govern'd by those natural notions. And if any thing that pretends to be a revelation from God should teach men that there is no God, or that he is not wise, and good, and just, and powerful; this is reason enough to reject it, how confident soever the pretence be, that it is a divine revelation.

And if any thing be, upon good grounds in reason, received for a divine revelation, (as the holy scriptures are amongst christians) no man ought to be regarded, who from thence pretends to maintain any doctrine contrary to the natural notions, which men have of God; such as clearly contradict his holiness, or goodness, or justice, or do by plain and undeniable consequence make God the author of sin, or the like; because the very attempt to prove any such thing out of the scripture, does strike at the divine authority of those books. For if they be from God it is certain they can contain no such thing. So that no man ought to suffer himself to be seduced into any such opinions, upon pretence that there are expressions in scripture, which seem to countenance them. For if they really did so, the consequence would not be the confirming of such opinions; but the weakning of the authority of the scripture it self. For just so many arguments as any man can draw from scripture for any such opinion, so many weapons he puts into the hands of atheists against the scripture it self.

I do not speak this, as if I thought there were any ground from scripture for any such doctrine, I am very certain there is not. And if there be any particular expressions, which to prejudic'd men may seem to import any such thing, every man ought to govern himself in the interpretation of such passages, by what is clear and plain, and agreeable to the main scope and tenor of the bible, and to those natural notions which men have of God, and of his perfections. For when all is done, this one of the surest ways of reasoning in religion; and whoever guides himself, and steers by this compass, can never err much: but whoever suffers himself to be led away by the appearance of some more obscure phrases in the expressions of scripture, and the glosses of men upon them, without regard to this rule, may run into the greatest delusions, may wander eternally, and lose himself in one mistake after another, and shall never find his way out of this endless labyrinth, but by this clue.

If St. James had not been an apostle, the argument which he used would have convinced any reasonable man, "that God tempts no man to sin, because he cannot be tempted with evil himself," and therefore it is unreasonable to imagine "he should tempt any man." For he argues from such a principle, as all mankind will, at first hearing, assent to.

And thus I have done with the first thing asserted by the apostle here in the text; "that God tempts no man to sin." "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man." Before I proceed to the second assertion, "that

“ that every man is his own greatest tempter,” I should draw some useful inferences from what hath been already delivered : but I reserve both the one and the other to the next opportunity.

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The sins of men not chargeable upon
GOD ; but upon themselves.

J A M E S i. 13, 14.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD ; for GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man : but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

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The second
sermon on
this text.

WHEN I made entrance upon these words, I told you, that next to the belief of a GOD and a providence, nothing is more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of these two principles ; “ that GOD is not the author of the sins of men ;” and “ that every man’s fault lies at his own door.” And both these principles St. James does clearly and fully assert in these words.

First, “ GOD tempts no man to sin.”

Secondly, “ every man is his own greatest tempter.”

The first of these I have largely spoken to in my former discourse ; and from what I then said, I shall only

only draw a few useful inferences, before I proceed to the second, viz. these which follow.

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First, let us beware of all such doctrines, as do any ways tend to make God the author of sin; either by laying a necessity upon men of sinning, or by laying secret designs to tempt and seduce men to sin. Nothing can be farther from the nature of God, than to do any such thing, and nothing can be more dishonourable to him, than to imagine any such thing of him; "he is of purer eyes than to behold evil;" and can we think, that he who cannot endure to see it, should have any hand in it? we find that the holy men in scripture are very careful to remove all thoughts and suspicion of this from God. Elisha, Job xxxvi. 3. before he would argue about God's providence with Job, he resolves in the first place, to attribute nothing to God, that is unworthy of him. "I will (says he) ascribe righteousness to my maker." So likewise St. Paul, Rom. vii. 7. "What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid." "Is the law sin?" that is, hath God given men a law to this end, that he might draw them into sin? far be it from him. Gal. ii. 17. "Is CHRIST the minister of sin? God forbid."

You see then how tender good men have always been of ascribing any thing to God, that might seem to render him the author of sin. So that we have reason to take heed of all doctrines that are of this tendency; such as are the doctrine of an absolute and irrelative decree to damn the greatest part of mankind; and in order to that, and as a means to it, efficaciously to permit them to sin.

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For if these things be true, that GOD hath absolutely decreed to damn the greatest part of men, and to make good this decree he permits them to sin, not by a bare permission of leaving them to themselves, but by such a permission as shall be efficacious; that is, he will so permit them to sin, as they cannot avoid it; then those who are under this decree of GOD, are under a necessity of sinning; which necessity, since it does not proceed from themselves, but from the decree of GOD, does by consequence make GOD the author of sin. And then that the other doctrine, which is subservient to this, that GOD does by a physical and natural influence upon the minds and wills of men, determine them to every action that they do, to bad actions as well as good. I know they who say so, tell us that GOD only determines men to the action, but not to the evil of it. For instance, when Cain killed his brother, GOD determin'd him (they say) to the natural action of taking away a man's life, which in many cases may be done without sin. Very true: but if in these circumstances the natural action could not be done without committing the sin, he that determined him to the natural action, determin'd him likewise to the sin.

I am far from any thought that those that maintain these doctrines, had any intention to make GOD the author of sin: but if this be the true necessary consequence of these doctrines, there is reason enough to reject them, how innocent soever the intention be of those who maintain them.

Secondly, let not us tempt any man to sin. All piety pretends to be an imitation of GOD, therefore let us endeavour to be like him in this. 'Tis true

indeed.

indeed, we may be tempted with evil, and therefore S E R M.
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we are likely enough to tempt others: but we ought not to do so. It is contrary to holiness and goodness, to the temper and disposition of the most perfect being in the world. God tempts no man; nay, it is the proper work and employment of the devil, it is his very trade and profession; he goes about seeking whom he may betray into sin and destruction. To this end he walks up and down the earth, waiting all opportunities and advantages upon men to draw them into sin; so that we are his factors and instruments, whenever we tempt men to sin.

Let those consider this, who are so active and busy to seduce men into any kind of wickedness, and to instruct them in the arts of iniquity, who tempt men into bad company and courses, and take pleasure in debauching a virtuous person, and make it a matter of great triumph to make a sober man drunk, as if it were so glorious an action to ruin a soul, and destroy that, which is more worth than the whole world. Whenever you go about this work, remember whose instruments you are, and whose work you do, and what kind of work it is. Tempting others to sin is in scripture called murder, for which reason, the devil is said to be "a murderer from the beginning," because he was a tempter. "Whoever committeth sin is of the devil:" but whoever tempts others to sin, is a sort of devil himself.

Thirdly, since God tempts no man, let us not tempt him. There is frequent mention in scripture of mens tempting God, i. e. trying him as it were whether he will do any thing for their sakes, that is mis-becoming his goodness, and wisdom, and

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faithfulness, or any other of his perfections. Thus the Israelites are said to have "tempted God in " the wilderness forty years together," and in that space, more remarkably ten times. The meaning of which expressions is, that when God had promised Abraham to bring his seed into the land of Canaan, that people, by their great and repeated provocations of God, did often provoke him to have destroyed them, and consequently to have fail'd of the promise which he made to the fathers. The devil likewise tempted our SAVIOUR to tempt God, by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, in confidence that the angels would take care of him: but our SAVIOUR answers him, " it " is written, thou shalt not tempt the LORD " thy God." From which instance it appears, that men are said to tempt God, whenever they expect the protection of his providence in an unwarrantable way. God hath promised to take care of good men: but if they neglect themselves, or willingly cast themselves into danger, and expect his providence and protection, they do not trust God, but tempt him; they try whether God's providence will countenance their rashness, and provide for them, when they neglect themselves; and protect them from those dangers to which they wilfully expose themselves.

So likewise if we be negligent in our callings, whereby we should provide for our families, if we lavish away that which we should lay up for them, and then depend upon the providence of God to supply them, and take care of them, we tempt God to that which is unworthy of him; which is to give approbation to our folly, and to countenance

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our sloth and carelessness. We cannot seduce God, and draw him to do any thing that mis-becomes him, but we tempt him, in expecting the care and protection of his providence, when we wilfully run our selves into danger, and neglect the means of providing for our own safety. And thus I have done with the first great principle contain'd in the text; viz, "That God is not the author of the sins of men." I proceed now to the

Second, "that every man is his own greatest tempter." "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." God does not tempt any man to sin: but every man is then tempted, when by his own lust, his irregular inclination and desire, he is seduced to evil, and enticed; καὶ ὁ ἐλεάζομεν, is caught as it were with bait, for so the greek word signifies.

In which words the apostle gives us a true account of the prevalency and efficacy of temptation upon men. It is not because God has any design to ensnare men in sin; but their own corruption and vicious inclinations seduce them to that which is evil. To instance in the particular temptations the apostle was speaking of, persecution and suffering for the cause of religion, to avoid which, many did then forsake the truth, and apostatiz'd from their christian profession. The true cause of which, was not the providence of God, which permitted them to be expos'd to those sufferings; but their inordinate love of the good things of this life, and their unreasonable fears of the evils and sufferings of it; they valued the enjoyments of this present life, more than the favour of God, and that eternal happiness

ness which he had promis'd to them in another life; and they feared the persecutions of men, more than the threatnings of God, and the dreadful punishments of another world. They had an inordinate affection for the ease and pleasure of this life, and their unwillingness to part with ease, was a great temptation to them to quit their religion; by this bait they were caught, when it came to the trial.

And thus it is proportionably in all other sorts of temptations. Men are betrayed by themselves, and the temptation without hath a party within them, with which it holds a secret correspondence, and which is ready to yield and give consent to it; so that it is our own consent, and treachery to ourselves, that makes any temptation master of us, and without that we are not to be overcome; "every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." It is the lust of men complying with the temptations which are offer'd to us, which renders them effectual, and gives them the victory over us.

In the handling of this argument. I shall from these words of the apostle observe to you these two things.

First, that as the apostle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency of temptation to the devil.

Secondly, that he ascribes the prevalency of temptation to the lust and vicious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a compliance with the temptations that are presented to them; "every man

“man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed.” These two observations shall be the subject of my present discourse. SERM.
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First, that as the apostle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency and efficacy of temptation to the devil. That he acquits God, I have shewn at large in my former discourse. It is evident likewise, that he does not ascribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the devil; for the apostle in this discourse of his concerning temptations, makes no express mention of the devil; he supposeth indeed, that baits are laid for men, “every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed;” i. e. when he plays with the baits that are laid for him, and swallows them. And the scripture elsewhere frequently tells us, that the devil is very active and busy to tempt men, and is continually laying baits before them; but their own lusts are the cause why they are caught by them.

And I do the rather insist upon this, because men are apt to lay great load upon the devil, in the business of temptation, hoping thereby either wholly, or at least in a great measure to excuse themselves; and therefore I shall here consider, how far the devil by his temptations is the cause of the sins which men by compliance with those temptations are drawn into.

First, it is certain that the devil is very active and busy to minister to them the occasions of sin, and temptations to it. For ever since he fell from God, partly out of enmity to him, and partly out of envy and malice to mankind, he hath made it his great business and employment to seduce men to

to sin; and to this end he walks up and down the earth, and watcheth all occasions and opportunities to tempt men to sin: and so far as his power reacheth, and God permits him, he lays baits and temptations before them in all their ways, presenting them with the occasions and opportunities to sin, and with such baits and allurements as are most suitable to their tempers, and most likely to prevail with their particular inclinations, and as often as he can, surprizing men with these at the easiest time of access, and with such circumstances, as may give his temptations the greatest force and advantage. Of this the scripture assures us in general, when it tells us of these wiles and devices of Satan, and of the methods of his temptations; so that tho' we do not particularly discern how and when he doth this, yet we have no reason to doubt of the thing, if we believe that there is such a spirit in the world as the scripture particularly tells us there is, that works in the children of disobedience, and that God, from whom nothing is hid, and who sees all the secret engines which are at work in the world, to do us good or harm, hath in mercy to mankind given us particular warning of it, and that we may not be wholly ignorant of our enemies and their malicious designs upon us, that we may be continually upon our guard, aware of our danger, and armed against it.

Secondly, the devil does not only present to men the temptations and occasions of sin; but when he is permitted to make nearer approaches to them, he does excite and stir them up to comply with these temptations, and to yield to them. And this he does, not only by employing his instruments to so-

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it for him, and to draw men to sin by bad coun- SERM.
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and example, which we see frequently done,

and probably very often by the devil's instigation; those who are very wicked themselves, and consequently more enslav'd to the devil, and under his power, being as it were factors for him to seduce others;) besides this, 'tis not improbable but the devil himself does many times immediately excite men to sin, by working upon the humours of their bodies, or upon their imaginations; and by that means infusing and suggesting evil motions to them; or by diverting them from those thoughts and considerations, which might check and restrain them from that wickedness to which he is tempting them; or by some other ways and means more secret and unknown to us. For the power of the spirits, whether good or bad, and the manner of their operations upon our minds, are things very secret, and of which we can give little or no account, but yet for all that, we have many times reason sufficient to believe a thing to be so, when we are wholly ignorant of the manner of it.

And there is reason, for what is said in scripture, to believe that the devil, in some cases, hath a more immediate power and influence upon the minds of men, to excite them to sin, and, where he discovers a very bad inclination or resolution, to help it forward, and to keep men to it; as when it is said, John xiii. 27. that "the devil enter'd into Judas," to push him on in that ill design which he had already engaged in, of betraying our SAVIOUR. And Acts v. 3. Satan is said to have "filled the heart of

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Ananias

“ Ananias, to lye to the HOLY GHOST, and to keep back part of the price” for which he had sold his estate ; which expreffions do seem to intimate to us some [more immediate power and influence which the devil had upon those persons : but then ’tis very observable, that this power is never ascribed to the devil, but in the case of great and horrid sins, and where men are beforehand notoriously depraved, and either by the actual commission of some former great sin, or by entertaining some very wicked design, have provoked God to permit the devil a nearer access to them. For Judas had first taken counsel how to betray CHRIST, before it is said “ the devil “ entred into him,” to push him on to the execution of it. And Ananias his covetousness had first tempted him to keep back part of his estate, before it is said “ the devil filled his heart to lye to the “ HOLY GHOST ;” so that what power the devil hath over men, they first give it him ; they consent to his outward temptations, before he can get within them. Hence it is that in scripture great sinners are described as being more immediately under the government and influence of the devil. Ephes. ii. 1, 2. where the apostle speaking of those, who from heathenism were converted to christianity, “ you (says he) hath “ he quickned, who were once dead in trespasses and “ sins ; wherein in times past ye walked, according “ the course of this world, according to the prince “ the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh “ in the children of disobedience, or unbelief ;” πνεύματι τῷ νῦν ἐνεργῶντι, “ the spirit that “ acts and inspires the children of unbelief ;” that is, those who continue in their infidelity, and would not believe and obey the gospel. When men are notoriously

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otoriously wicked and disobedient to the counsels of SERM.
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God, the devil is said to act and inspire them, which certainly signifies some more immediate power and influence which he hath over such persons.

For as it is very probable, that the devil is sometimes permitted to come near good men so as to tempt them; so by notorious wickedness and impiety, men do give admission to him, and he is permitted by the just judgment of God, to exercise greater dominion over them. By resisting his temptations, we drive him from us. So St. James tells us, chap. iv. ver. 7. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you:" but as we yield to his temptations, he continually makes nearer approaches to us, and gains a greater power over us.

Thirdly, but for all this, the devil can force no man to sin; his temptations may move and excite men to sin, but that they are prevalent and effectual, proceeds from our own will and consent; 'tis our own lusts closing with his temptations, that produce sin, the devil hath more or less power over men, according as they give way to him; but never so much as to force their wills, and to compel them to consent to, and comply with his temptations; the grace of God doth hardly offer this violence to men for their good, in order to their salvation; and therefore much less will he permit the devil to have his power over men to their ruin and destruction. God's commanding us to resist the devil, supposeth that his temptations are not irresistible.

Fourthly, from what hath been said, it appears, that tho' the devil be frequently necessary to the sins of men, yet we our selves are the authors of them; he tempts us many times to sin, but it is we that

commit it. His temptations may sometimes be so violent as to extenuate our fault, but never so forcible as wholly to excuse us; for we are so far guilty of sin, as we give our consent to it; and how powerful soever the temptation be to any kind of evil, there is always enough of our own will in it to render us guilty.

I am far from thinking that the devil tempts men to all the evil that they do. I rather think that the greatest part of the wickedness that is committed in the world, springs from the evil motions of mens own minds. Mens own lusts are generally to them the worst devil of the two, and do more strongly incline them to sin, than any devil without them can tempt them to it. It is not to be doubted, that the devil does all the mischief he can to the souls of men, so far as God permits him; and tho' the number of evil angels be probably very great, yet it is but finite, and every one of them hath a limited power; and tho' they be very active, yet they can be but one where at once; so that his malice at the utmost does only all the evil that it can, not all that it would; he plies where he has the best custom, where he has the fairest opportunity, and the greatest hopes; he leaves men many times for a season (as it is said) he did our SAVIOUR, because he despairs of success at that time; and it may be sometimes when he is gone, these persons grow secure, and through their own security and folly fall into those sins, which the devil with all his baits and wiles, whilst they were upon their guard, could not tempt them to commit.

Others after he has made them sure, and put them into the way of it, will go on of themselves, and

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are as mad of sinning, as forward to destroy themselves, as the devil himself could wish; so that he can hardly tempt men to any wickedness, which he does not find them inclined to of themselves. These he can trust with themselves, and leave them to their own inclinations and conduct, finding by experience, that they will do as ill things of their own motion, as if Satan stood continually at their right hand to prompt them, and put them on, so that he can go into a far country, and employ himself elsewhere, and leave them for a long time, being confident that in his absence they will not bury their talent, and hide it in a napkin, but will improve it to a great advantage. And I wish that our own age did not afford us too many instances of this kind, of such forward and expert sinners as need no tempter either to instruct or excite them to that which is evil. Now in this case the devil betakes himself to other persons, and removes his snares and baits where he thinks there is more need and occasion for them.

So that we may reasonably conclude, that there is a great deal of wickedness committed in the world, which the devil hath no immediate hand in, tho' he always rejoiceth in it when it is done; and that there is a great deal more reason to attribute all good to the motions and operations of the SPIRIT of God, than to ascribe all sin and wickedness in the world to the devil; because the SPIRIT of God is more powerful, and is always every where, and is more intent upon his design, and as forward to promote it, as the devil can be to carry on his work; nay, I doubt not but he is more active to excite men to good, than the devil can be to tempt them to evil. And yet for all this, I think there is no great

great reason to doubt, but that good men do many good actions of their own inclination, without any special and immediate motion from the SPIRIT of GOD. They are indeed at first regenerate, and sanctified by the HOLY GHOST, and are continually afterwards under the conduct of the same SPIRIT: but where there is a new nature, it is of itself inclinable to that which is good, and will bring forth fruits, and do actions answerable. Much less do I think that the devil tempts every man to all the evil that he does, or the greatest part. When the lusts of men, and the habits of vice are grown strong and confirmed, the devil may spare his temptations in a great measure; for after wicked men are wound up to such a pitch of impiety, they will go a great while of themselves.

I have done with the first observation, that as the apostle acquits GOD from having any hand in tempting men to sin, so neither does he ascribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the devil. I proceed to the

Second observation, that he ascribes the efficacy and success of temptation to the lusts and vicious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a consent and compliance with the temptations which are afforded to them. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed." We have many powerful enemies; but we are much more in danger of treachery from within, than of assaults from without. All the power of our enemies could not destroy us, if we were but true to ourselves; so that the apostle had great reason to ascribe the efficacy of temptation to the irregular desires and vicious inclinations of men, rather than to

to those temptations which the providence of God permits them to be assaulted with, and consequently to lay the blame of mens sins chiefly upon themselves.

And that chiefly upon these two accounts.

First, because the lusts of men are in a great measure voluntary.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to resist those temptations, and overcome them. Now so far as the lusts of men are voluntary, it is their own fault that they are seduced by them, and if God hath put it in our power to resist and overcome temptations, we may blame ourselves, if we be overcome and foiled by them.

First, the lusts of men are in a great measure voluntary. By the lusts of men, I mean their irregular desires and vicious inclinations. I grant that the nature of man is very much corrupted, and degenerated from its primitive integrity and perfection: but we who are christians, have received that grace in baptism, whereby our natures are so far healed, as if we be not wanting to ourselves, and do not neglect the means which God hath appointed to us, we may mortify our lusts, and live a new life; so that if our lusts remain unmortified, we ourselves are in fault, much more if they gain new strength, and proceed to habits; for this could not be, if we did not after we come to age, and are able to discern between, and to choose good and evil, voluntarily consent to iniquity, and by wilful and deliberate practice of known sins, improve the evil inclinations of our nature into vicious habits: but if instead of mortifying and subduing the evil propensions of our nature (which is no very difficult work to most persons, if they begin

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gin it betimes) we will cherish and give new life and power to them, we forfeit the grace which we received in baptism, and bring ourselves again under the power and dominion of sin; and no wonder then, if our lusts seduce us, and make us ready to comply with the temptations of the world and the devil.

Nay, and after this it is still our own fault, if we do not mortify our lusts; for if we would hearken to the counsel of God, and obey his calls to repentance, and sincerely beg his grace and HOLY SPIRIT to this purpose, we might yet recover ourselves, and "by the SPIRIT mortify the lusts of the flesh;" for tho' we have left God, he hath not quite forsaken us, but is ready to afford his grace again to us, tho' we have neglected and abused it, and to give his HOLY SPIRIT to those that ask him, tho' they have forfeited it, so that tho' our lusts spring from something which is natural, yet that they live and have dominion over us, is voluntary, because we might remedy it if we would, and make use of those means which God in the gospel offers to us.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to resist these temptations, and overcome them; so that it is our own fault, if we yield to them, and be overcome by them.

It is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations; and the grace of God, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourselves, puts it in our power to resist any temptation that may happen to us.

First, it is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations. If we do but make use of our natural reason, and those considerations which are common and obvious to men, we may easily resist the

the temptations to a great many sins. Some sins are so horrid in their nature, that when we have the strongest temptations to them; we cannot but have a natural aversion from them; as deliberate murder, the danger and guilt whereof, are both so great, as make it easy for any considerate man to resist the strongest temptation to it, even that of revenge. A plain act of injustice, whether by great fraud, or by downright oppression, is so base and disgraceful, so odious and abhorred by humane nature, that it is not difficult to a man that hath but a common understanding, and common inclination to be honest, to overcome the greatest temptation of gain and advantage; nay he must offer considerable violence to his nature and reason, to bring himself to it at first. Prophaneness and contempt of God and religion is so monstrous a fault, and of so dreadful an appearance, that every man that will but use his reason, can have no temptation to it, either from gratifying his humour, or pleasing his company, or shewing his wit, that can be of equal force with the arguments which every man's mind and conscience is apt to suggest to him against it.

Nay, there are many sins much inferior to these, the temptations whereto may by the ordinary reasons and considerations of prudence and interest, be baffled and put out of countenance. To instance in common swearing, to which I think there is no temptation, either from pleasure or advantage, but only from fashion and custom. Now this temptation is easy to be conquer'd, by considering that every man that professeth to believe the bible, must acknowledge it to be a sin; and if any man be con-

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vinc'd that it is a sin, I dare undertake to convince him that he can leave it. He that can choose at any time whether he will speak or not (which it is certainly in every man's power to do) can choose whether he will swear when he speaks. If he says he does it by custom and habit, and when he does not think of it; a very little care and resolution will in a short time cure any man of that custom; so that it is naturally in every man's power, to break off this sin.

Secondly, the grace of GOD puts it into our power, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to ourselves, to resist any temptation that may happen to us; and what the grace of GOD puts into our power, is as truly in our power, as what we can do ourselves. GOD offers his grace to every man under the gospel, for he has promised "to give his HOLY SPIRIT" "to them that ask him," and it is naturally in every man's power to ask it, otherwise the promise signifies nothing; for if no man can ask the SPIRIT of GOD, till he first have it, then to promise it to them that ask it, is to promise it to them who have it already, and then 'tis needless to ask it. And if GOD offers his grace to every man, then 'tis every man's fault if he have it not; and every man that hath it, may by the ordinary assistance of that grace, resist any ordinary temptation. And if at any time GOD suffers good men to be assaulted, he hath promised in such cases an extraordinary grace and assistance: and that either "he will not suffer us to be" "tempted above what we are able, or that with the" "temptation he will find a way to escape, that we" "may be able to bear it."

And thus I have done with the second thing I propounded to speak to from these words, that every

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every man is his own greatest tempter. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed." And now the proper inferences from what I have been all this while discoursing to you, are these three.

First, not to think to excuse ourselves, by laying the blame of our sins upon the temptation of the devil. That the devil tempts us is not our fault, because we cannot help it; but it is our voluntary compliance with his temptations, our consenting to that evil which he solicits us to, which maketh us guilty.

Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lusts; the lusts of our own hearts give the efficacy to the temptations of the devil: men many times sin upon the motions and suggestions of the devil: but tho' he be guilty of tempting us, we are guilty of consenting to his temptations.

Many times we are not sure that the devil tempts us to such a sin, but we are sure that we commit it, and consequently that we are guilty of it. Nay it is certain, if there were no devil, many would be wicked, and perhaps not much less wicked than they are. The lusts and vicious inclinations of men would yield to the temptations of the world, tho' there were none to manage them, and to set them on to the greatest advantage; so that we cannot excuse our faults upon this account, that we are tempted by the devil. If this were a sufficient excuse for us, the devil would take no pleasure in tempting us; the whole design of his temptation being to make us guilty, and by the guilt of sin to make us miserable.

Secondly, from hence we learn what reason we have to pray to God, that he would "not lead

“ us into temptation,” i. e. not permit us to fall into it; for in the phrase of scripture, God is many times said to do those things, which his providence permits to be done. The best of us have some remainders of lust, some irregular desires and appetites, which will be apt to betray us to sin, when powerful temptations are presented to us; so that it is a great happiness to the best of men, to be kept by the providence of God out of the way of violent temptations; for our own strength to resist them is but small, and we are apt to be secure, and to neglect our guard; we are easy to be surprized, and in continual danger through our own weakness or carelessness. Our greatest security is, if we be sincere, and heartily desirous to do well, and firmly resolved against sin, and do depend upon God for his grace and assistance, that his providence will not suffer us to fall into the hands of dangerous and violent temptations, which probably would be too hard for us; he who knows what our strength is, “ will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.”

Thirdly, from hence we may learn the best way to disarm temptations, and to take away the power of them, and that is, by mortifying our lusts, and subduing our vicious inclinations. When this is done (which by the grace of God may be done) temptation hath lost its greatest advantage upon us. The conspiracy of our lusts, with the temptations that set upon us, that betrays us into their power. The true reason why men fall into sin, is not because they are tempted, but because there is something within them, which inclines and disposes them to comply with the temptation, and to yield to it. It is said

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said, when the devil came to our SAVIOUR to tempt him, that "he found nothing in him," and therefore his temptations had no force upon him. The more we mortify our lusts, the less the devil will find in us, for his temptations to work upon. Every spark is dangerous, when it falls upon combustible matter; but tho' sparks fly never so thick, there is no danger, so long as there is nothing about us to catch fire.

If we will not be drawn aside and enticed to sin, let us mortify our lusts; for so far as we are mortified, we are out of the power of temptation.

Men are apt to complain of temptations, that they are too hard for them, and that they are not able to resist them, tho' they pray to God continually for his grace to that purpose. This indeed is one means very proper and necessary to be used; but this is not all that we are to do; we must break off habits of sin, and subdue our lusts, and keep under our inclinations, and then we shall find ourselves able to resist and encounter temptations with more success. And 'till we do this, in vain do we pray for God's grace, and depend upon him for strength to overcome the temptations that do assault us; for God's grace was never design'd to countenance the sloth and negligence of men, but to encourage and second our resolutions and endeavours of well-doing. If we expect God's grace and assistance upon other terms, we tempt God, and provoke him to leave us to the power of temptations, to be "drawn away and enticed by our own lusts."

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S E R M O N CXVII.

Proving J E S U S to be the M E S S I A S.

MATTH. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Now when John had heard in prison the works of CHRIST, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, art thou he that should come ; or do we look for another ? JESUS answered and said unto them, go and shew John again these things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

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ABOUT the time of our SAVIOUR'S appearing in the world, there was a general expectation of a great prince, that should come out of Judea, and govern all nations : this the Gentiles had from the prophecies of the Sibyls, which spake of a great king that was to appear in the world about that time. So Virgil tells us, that the time of Augustus was the utmost date of that prophecy ;

Ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas :

And Suetonius tells us, “ that all over the eastern countries, there was an ancient and constant tradition, that such a prince should spring out of Judea :” And for this reason it is, that our SAVIOUR is call'd by the prophet, “ the expectation of the nations.”

But

But more especially among the Jews, there was at that time a more lively and particular expectation, grounded upon the predictions of their prophets, of a prince whom they call'd the MESSIAS, or the Anointed; and those who were more devout among them, did at that time wait for his appearance; as it is said of Simeon, that "he waited for the consolation of Israel." Hence it was, that when John the baptist appeared in the quality of an extraordinary prophet, "they sent from Jerusalem to enquire whether he were the MESSIAS?" John i. 9. "The Jews sent priests and levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who art thou? and he confessed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the CHRIST." The Sanhedrim, to whom it belonged to judge who were the true prophets, sent to know whether he was the MESSIAS or not? "he would not take this honour to himself;" but told them the MESSIAS was just at hand; and the next day, "when Jesus came to be baptized of him," he bare record, "that he was the SON of GOD, and that he saw the SPIRIT descending and abiding upon him."

So that it is plain that he knew him, and bare witness of him, which makes it the more strange that here in the text, "he should send two of his disciples to enquire," whether he were the MESSIAS or not? "art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" that is, art thou the MESSIAS, or not? for so he is call'd in the ancient prophecies of him, $\delta \epsilon \rho \chi \acute{o} \mu \epsilon \nu \textcircled{\text{C}}$, he that should come, Gen. xix. 10. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, till Shiloh come."

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For the resolution of this difficulty, it is very probably said by interpreters, and I think there is no reason to doubt of it, that John the Baptist did not send this message for his own satisfaction, but to satisfy his disciples, who were never very willing to acknowledge JESUS for the MESSIAS, because they thought he did shadow and cloud their master. From whence we may take notice, how mens judgments are apt to be perverted by faction and interest; and that good men are too prone to be swayed thereby; for such we suppose the disciples of John to have been; they will not believe their own master, when they apprehend him to speak against their interest; for they knew that they must rise and fall in their reputation and esteem, as their master did. They believed that their master was a prophet, and came from GOD; yet for all that, they could not digest his testimony of CHRIST, because that set him above their master; which they were sagacious enough to perceive, that it tended to the diminution and lessening of themselves. And that this was the thing which troubled them, appears plainly from the complaint which they make to their master, John iii. 26. "The disciples of John came to him and said, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." This troubled them, to see him invade their master's office, and that he began to have more followers than John had; "he baptizeth, and all men come to him."

This prejudice John had endeavoured to root out of their minds, by telling them, that he had always declared that he was not the MESSIAS, ver 28. "You your selves bear me witness, that I said,

" and

“ am not the CHRIST, but that I am sent before^{SERM. CXVII.} him.” But when he perceived it still to stick with them, and that they observed all his actions, and the miracles that he wrought, as if they had a mind to pick a quarrel with him (for St. Luke, who relates the same story, tells us, that when our SAVIOUR had healed the centurion’s servant, and raised from the dead the widow’s son at Naim, the disciples of John shewed him all these things) I say, John Baptist perceiving that they watched him so narrowly, sent two of his disciples to him, that they might receive full satisfaction from him.

And St. Luke tells us, that upon their coming to him, he wrought many of his miracles before them, to convince them that he was the true MESSIAS, Luke vii. 21, 22. “ And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits ; and to many that were blind he gave sight ; ” and then said to the disciples of John, “ go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard ; how that the blind see, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached ; and blessed is he that is not offended in me.”

So that you see that the reason why John Baptist sent to our SAVIOUR to know whether he was the MESSIAS, was not to satisfy himself, for he had no doubt of it ; but perceiving his disciples to be ill-affected towards our SAVIOUR, and hearing them speak with some envy of his miracles, he sent them to him, that by seeing what he did and hearing

what account he gave of himself, they might receive full satisfaction concerning him.

I have been the longer in the clearing of this, that men upon every appearance of contradiction in the evangelical history, may not be too forward to suspect the truth of it; but may be convinc'd, that if they would but have patience to examine things carefully, they would find that the story does sufficiently vindicate it self; and tho' it be penn'd, with great simplicity, yet there is sufficient care taken, to free it from being guilty of any contradiction to it self.

The occasion of the words being thus cleared, there are in them these two things considerable.

First, what it was that John the baptist sent his disciples to be satisfied about; and that was, whether he was the MESSIAS or not? "now when John had heard in prison the works of CHRIST, he sent two of his disciples." The circumstance of his being in prison, seems to be mention'd, to intimate to us the reason why he did not come himself along with them; he sent two of his disciples to him, who said unto him, "art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" and then,

Secondly, the answer which our SAVIOUR returns to this message; "JESUS answered and said unto them, go and shew John again the things which ye do see and hear; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them; and blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

So that these words contain, first, the evidence SERM. CXVII.
which our SAVIOUR gives of his being the true
MESSIAS. Secondly, an intimation that notwith-

standing all this evidence which he gave of himself,
yet many would be offended at him, and reject him;
blessed is he, whosoever is not offended in me."

First, the evidence which our SAVIOUR gives of
his being the true MESSIAS, and to prove this,
there were but two things necessary.

1. To shew that he was sent by GOD, and had a
particular commission from him.

2. That he was the very person of whom the
prophets foretold that he should be the MESSIAS.

The first of these he proves by the miracles which
he wrought; and the second, by the correspon-
dency of the things he did, with what was foretold
by the prophets concerning the MESSIAS; the pro-
phesies concerning the MESSIAS were accomplish'd
in him.

First, by the miracles which he wrought; "the
blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the
lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the
dead are raised up." Here is a brief enumeration
of the several sorts of miracles which our SAVIOUR
wrought, and these were a testimony to him that
he came from GOD, and was sent and commissioned
by him to declare his will to the world. So he
himself tells us, John v. 39. "I have a greater wit-
ness than that of John, for the works which the
FATHER hath given me to finish, the same
works that I do, bear witness of me, that the
FATHER hath sent me." Upon the evidence of
these miracles, Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews,
was convinced that he was sent by GOD, John iii. 2.

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“ We know that thou art a teacher come from
“ God, for no man can do these miracles that thou
“ dost, except God be with him.” Nay his greatest
enemies were afraid of his miracles, knowing how
proper an argument they are to convince men, John
xi. 47. when the chief priests and pharisees were
met together in council against him, they concluded,
that if he were permitted to go on and work mira-
cles, he would draw all men after him. “ What
“ do we? (say they) for this man doth many mi-
“ racles; if we let him thus alone, all men will
“ believe on him.” This they said, upon occasion
of the great miracle of raising Lazarus from the
dead.

And in reason, miracles are the highest attestation
that can be given to the truth and divinity of any
doctrine; and supposing a doctrine not to be plainly
unworthy of God, and contrary to those natural noti-
ons which men have of God and religion, we can
have no greater evidence of the truth of it, than mi-
racles; they are such an argument, as in its own na-
ture is apt to persuade and induce belief.

All truths do not need miracles; some are of easy
belief, and are so clear by their own light, that they
need neither miracle nor demonstration to prove
them. Such are those self-evident principles which
mankind do generally agree in; others which are
not so evident by their own light, we are content
to receive upon clear demonstration of them, or
very probable arguments for them, without a miracle.
And there are some truths, which however they
may be sufficiently obscure and uncertain to most
men, yet are they so inconsiderable, and of so small
consequence, as not to deserve the attestation of
miracles

miracles; so that there is no reason to expect that God should interpose by a miracle, to convince men of them. SERM.
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*Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.*

But for such truths as are necessary to be known by us, but are not sufficiently evident of themselves, or capable of cogent evidence, especially to prejudiced and interested persons, God is pleased in this case many times to work miracles for our conviction; and they are a proper argument to convince us of a thing that is either in it self obscure and hard to be believed, or which we are prejudiced against, and hardly brought to believe; for they are an argument *à majori ad minus*, they prove a thing which is obscure and hard to be believed, by something that is more incredible, which yet they cannot deny because they see it done. Thus our SAVIOUR proves himself to be an extraordinary person, by “doing such things as never man did;” he convinceth them, that they ought to believe what he said, because they saw him do those things, which were harder to be believed (if one had not seen them) than what he said.

Miracles are indeed the greatest external confirmation and evidence that can be given to the truth of any doctrine, and where they are wrought with all the advantages they are capable of, they are an unquestionable demonstration of the truth of it; and such were our SAVIOUR's miracles here in the text, to prove that he was the true MESSIAS; here are miracles of all kinds, “the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.” For the nature

ture of them, they are such as are most likely to be divine and to come from God, for they were healing and beneficial to mankind. Our SAVIOUR here instanceth in those things which are of greatest benefit and advantage, and which free men from the greatest miseries and inconveniences; the restoring of sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; soundness and health to the lame and the leprous, and life to the dead. And then for the number of them, they were many; not one instance of a kind, but several of every kind, and great multitudes of most of them, and for the manner of their operation, they were publick, in the sight and view of great multitudes of people; to free them from all suspicion of fraud and imposture, they were not wrought privately and in corners, and given out and noised abroad, but before all the people, so that every one might see them, and judge of them; not only among his own disciples and followers, as the church of Rome pretends to work theirs, but among his enemies, “to convince those that did not believe;” and this not done once, and in one place, but at several times, and in all places where he came, and for a long time, for three years and a half, and after his death, he endowed his disciples and followers with the same power, which lasted for some ages. And then for the quality of them, they were miracles of the greatest magnitude; those of them, which in themselves might have been performed by natural means, as healing the lame and the leprous, and the deaf, he did in a miraculous manner, by a word or a touch, yea, and many times at a great distance. But others were not only in the manner of their operation, but in the nature of the thing unquestionably miraculous,

ous, as giving of sight to those that had been born blind, and raising up the dead to life, as Lazarus, after he had lain in the grave four days; and himself afterwards, the third day after he had been buried; which, if there ever was or can be any unquestionable miracles in the world, ought certainly to be reputed such. So that our blessed SAVIOUR had all the attestation that miracles can give, that he came from God. And this is the first evidence of his being the MESSIAS.

The Jews acknowledge that the MESSIAS when he comes shall work great miracles; their own tal-mud confesseth, that "JESUS the son of Joseph and Mary did work great miracles;" and the history of the gospel does particularly relate more and greater miracles wrought by him, than by Moses and all the prophets that had been since the world began; so that we may still put the same question to the Jews, which they did in our SAVIOUR's time to one another; "when CHRIST cometh," when the MESSIAS whom ye expect comes, "will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"

But, secondly, this will yet more clearly appear by the correspondency of the things here mentioned, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the MESSIAS.

Not to mention innumerable circumstances of his birth, and life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension into heaven, together with the success and prevalency of his doctrine in the world, all which are punctually foretold by some or other of the prophets: I shall confine myself to the particulars here in the text.

First,

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First, It was foretold of the MESSIAS, that he should work miraculous cures. Isa. xxxv. 4, 5, 6. speaking of the MESSIAS, "he will come and save you; then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, "and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopp'd; then "shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue "of the dumb sing;" this you see was fulfilled here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, the text mentions another miracle which is not in the prophet, that "he raised the dead;" but if God did more than he promised and foretold, this is no prejudice to the argument, if all that he foretold was accomplish'd in him. Besides, the Jews have a proverb, that God is not content to perform barely what he promiseth, but "he usually doth something over and above his "promise." That the MESSIAS should "heal the "blind, and the deaf, and the lame," Isaiah prophesied; and God makes good this promise and prediction to the full; the MESSIAS did not only do these, but which is more and greater than any of these, "he raised the dead to life."

Secondly, it was likewise foretold of the MESSIAS, that he "should preach the gospel to the poor," Isa. lxi. 1. "The SPIRIT of the LORD God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good "tidings unto the meek, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι πτωχοῖς, to "preach the gospel or good tidings to the poor;" so the LXXII render the words; and they are the very words used by our SAVIOUR here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, this was no miracle, but it was the punctual accomplishment of a prophesy concerning the MESSIAS, and consequently an evidence that he was the MESSIAS. But besides it had something in it which was very strange to the Jews, and very different

erent from the way of their doctors and teachers; for the rabbies among the jews would scarce instruct any but for great reward; they would meddle with none but those that were able to requite their pains; the ordinary and poorer sort of people they had in great contempt, as appears by that slighting expression of them, John vii. 48, 49. "Have any of the rulers of the pharisees believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." And Grotius upon this text tells us, that the jewish masters had this foolish and insolent proverb among them, that "the SPIRIT of GOD doth not rest but upon a rich man," to which this prediction concerning the MESSIAS was a direct contradiction: "the SPIRIT of the LORD is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." In old time the prophets were especially sent to the kings and princes of the people: but this great prophet comes to "preach the gospel to the poor." None have so little reason to be proud as the sons of men, but never was any so humble as the SON of GOD; our SAVIOUR's whole life and doctrine was a contradiction to the false opinions of the world; they thought the rich and great men of the world the only happy persons, but he came to preach glad tidings to the poor," to bring good news to them whom the great doctors of the law despised, and set at nought; and therefore to confound their pride and folly, and to confute their false opinions of things, he begins that excellent sermon of his with this saying, "blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of GOD."

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Thirdly, it was foretold of the MESSIAS, that the world should be offended at him, Isa. viii. 14. "He shall be for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel." And Isa. liii. 1, 2, 3. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him; he is despised and rejected of men, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not;" and this likewise is intimated in the last words of the text, "and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." Intimating, that notwithstanding the great works that he did among them, which testified of him that he came from God, notwithstanding the predictions of their prophets concerning the MESSIAS, were so clearly and punctually accomplish'd in him; yet notwithstanding all this, they would take offence at him upon one account or other, and reject him and his doctrine; but even this, that they rejected him, and would not own him for their MESSIAS, was another sign or evidence that he was the true MESSIAS foretold by the prophets; for among other things this was expressly predicted concerning him, that he should be despised and rejected of men.

And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to; namely, the evidence which our SAVIOUR here gives of his being the true MESSIAS.

First, the many and great miracles which he wrought, prove that he came from God. And,

Secondly,

Secondly, the correspondence of the things he did, SERM.
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with what was foretold by the prophets concerning
the MESSIAS, declare him to be the true MESSIAS.

I now proceed to the next thing I propounded to
speak to, namely,

Secondly, an intimation in the text, that notwith-
standing all the evidence CHRIST gave of himself,
yet many would be offended at him, and reject him
and his doctrine. In speaking to which, it will be
very proper to consider,

First, how the poor came to be more disposed to
receive the gospel than others.

Secondly, what those prejudices are which the
world had against our SAVIOUR and his religion
at its first appearance, as also those which men have
at this day against the christian religion, and to
endeavour to shew the unreasonableness of them.

Thirdly, how happy a thing it is to escape and
overcome the common prejudices which men have
against religion.

First, how the poor came to be more disposed to
receive the gospel than others; "the poor have the
gospel preached unto them." Which does not only
signify that our SAVIOUR did more especially apply
himself to them, but likewise that they were in a
nearer disposition to receive it, and did of all others
give the most ready entertainment to his doctrine:
and this our SAVIOUR declares to us in the begin-
ning of his sermon upon the mount, when he pro-
nounceth the poor blessed upon this account, because
they were nearer to the kingdom of God than
others; "blessed are the poor, for theirs is the
kingdom of God." So likewise St. James, chap. ii.
ver. 5. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this

SERM. " world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom,
 CXVII. " which he hath promised to them that love him?"

So that it seems the poor were upon some account or other in a nearer disposition to receive the gospel, than the great and rich men of this world. And of this there are three accounts to be given.

First, the poor had no earthly interest to engage them to reject our SAVIOUR and his doctrine. The high priests, and scribes, and pharisees among the Jews, they had a plain worldly interest which did engage them to oppose our SAVIOUR and his doctrine; for if he were received for the MESSIAS, and his doctrine embraced, they must of necessity lose their sway and authority among the people; and all that which rendred them so considerable, their pretended skill in the law, and in the traditions and observances of their fathers, together with their external shews of piety and devotion, would signify nothing, if our SAVIOUR and his doctrine should take place. And there are very few so honest and sincere, as to be content for truth's sake, to part with their reputation and authority, and to become less in the esteem of men than they were before. Few are so impartial as to quit those things which they once had laid great weight upon, and kept a great stir about, because this is to acknowledge that they were in an error, and mistaken in their zeal, which few have the ingenuity to own, tho' it be never so plain to others; and therefore it is no wonder that our SAVIOUR's doctrine met with so much resistance from those, who were so much concern'd in point of honour and reputation, to make head against it. And this account our SAVIOUR himself gives us of their infidelity, John v. 44. "How

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“ can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?” And chap. xii. 43. “ For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

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And besides the point of reputation, those that were rich, were concerned in point of interest, to oppose our SAVIOUR and his doctrine; because he call'd upon men “ to deny themselves, and to part with houses and lands, yea and life it self, for his sake, and for the gospel's,” which must needs be a very hard and unpleasant doctrine to rich men, who had great estates, and had set their hearts upon them. Upon this account it is that our SAVIOUR pronounceth it so “ hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God;” and compares it with those things that are most difficult, and humanly impossible; “ I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

But now the poor were free from these incumbrances and temptations; they had nothing to lose, and therefore our SAVIOUR's doctrine went down more easily with them; because it did not contradict their interest, as it did the interest of those who had great estates and possessions.

Secondly, another reason of this is, that those that are poor, and enjoy little of the good things of this life, are willing to entertain good news of happiness in another. Those who are in a state of present misery and suffering, are glad to hear that it shall be well with them hereafter, and are willing to listen to the good news of a future happiness; and therefore our SAVIOUR, when he had pronounced the
“ poor

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“poor blessed,” Luke vi. 20. adds by way of opposition, ver. 24. “But wo unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation.” They were in so comfortable a condition at present, that they were not much concerned what should become of them hereafter; whereas all the comfort that poor men have, is the hopes of a better condition, *non si malè nunc, & olim sic erit*, that “if it be bad now, it will not be so always,” and therefore no wonder if the promises and assurance of a future happiness be very welcome to them.

Thirdly, if by the poor we do not only understand those who are in a low and mean condition as to the things of this world, but such likewise as had a temper and disposition of mind suitable to the poverty of their outward condition, which our SAVIOUR calls “poverty of spirit,” by which he means “meekness and humility,” there is no doubt but that such a frame and temper of spirit is a great disposition to the receiving of truth. And that this is included in the notion of poverty, is very plain, both from the words of the prophesy I cited before, Isa. lxi. 1. “The SPIRIT of the LORD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted;” and likewise from our SAVIOUR’s description of these persons, in one of the evangelists, Matth. v. 3. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” So that by the poor who are so nearly disposed to receive the gospel, our SAVIOUR intended those, who, being in a poor and low condition in respect of outward things, were likewise meek and humble in their spirits. Now meekness and humility are great dispo-

dispositions to the entertaining of truth. These graces and virtues do prepare the minds of men for learning and instruction ; meekness and modesty, and humility, are the proper dispositions of a scholar. He that hath a mean opinion of himself is ready to learn of others ; he who is not blinded by pride or passion, is more apt to consider things impartially, and to pass a truer judgment upon them, than the proud and passionate. Passion and pride are great obstacles to the receiving of truth, and to our improvement in knowledge. Passion does not only darken the minds of men, but puts a false bias upon our judgments, which draws them off many times from truth, and sways them that way to which our passion inclines them. A man of a calm and meek temper, stands always indifferent for the receiving of truth, and holds the balance of his judgment even ; but passion sways and inclines it one way, and that commonly against truth and reason. So likewise pride is a great impediment to knowledge, and the very worst quality that a learner can have, it obstructs all the passages whereby knowledge should enter into us, it makes men refuse instruction, out of a conceit they need it not. Many men might have known more, had it not been for the vain opinion which they have entertained of the sufficiency of their knowledge. This is true in all kinds of learning, but more especially as to the knowledge of divine things. For God loves to communicate himself, and bestow his grace and wisdom upon meek and humble minds. So the scripture tells us, Psal. xxv. 9. " The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways." And 1 Pet. v. 5. " Be clothed with humility ;

SERM. "humility; for GOD resisteth the proud, and giv-
CXVII. "eth grace to the humble." ✓

And thus I have shewn in what respects the poor were more disposed for the receiving the gospel, than others. I now proceed to the

Second thing, namely, what those prejudices and objections are, which the world had against our SAVIOUR and his religion at their first appearance; as also to enquire into those which men have at this day against the christian religion, and to shew the weakness and unreasonableness of them. I begin,

First, with those prejudices which the world had against our SAVIOUR and his religion at their first appearance.

Both Jews and Gentiles were offended at him and his doctrine; but not both upon the same account. They both took exceptions at him, especially at his low and suffering condition; but not both upon the same reason. I shall begin with the exceptions which the Jews took against our blessed SAVIOUR and his religion; and I shall reduce them all, or at least the most considerable of them (as I find dispersed in the history of the gospel, and in the Acts of the apostles) to these six heads.

First, the exceptions which they took against him upon account of his extraction and original.

Secondly, at the meanness of his condition, contrary to their universal expectation.

Thirdly, as to his miracles.

Fourthly, his conversation.

Fifthly, the prejudice that lay against him from the opposition that was made by persons of the greatest knowledge and authority among them. And,
Lastly,

Lastly, that the religion which he endeavour'd to introduce, did abolish and supersede their ancient religion, as of no longer use and continuance, though it was plain it was at first instituted by GOD.

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First, the exceptions which they took at his extraction and original. In relation to this they were founded at three things.

1. That his original was known among them. This you find urged against him, John vii. 27. "We know this man whence he is, but when the MESSIAS comes, no man knows whence he is."

This to be sure was no just exception in reason against him. For what if his extraction were known, might he not be from GOD for all that? They owned Moses for the greatest prophet that ever was, and yet it was very well known from whence he was.

But they seem to refer to some prophesy of the old testament, which did seem to assert so much. If they meant that his extraction should be altogether unknown; they knew very well, and believed the contrary, that "he was to be of the line of David, and to come out of Bethlehem." If they referred to that prophesy, that "a virgin should conceive and bear a son," and so understood that he should be without father; this was really true, tho' they thought that he was the son of Joseph. And if he affirmed that he had no father, he did sufficiently justify it by his miracles; that being as easy to be believed possible by a divine power, as the miracles which he wrought; which yet they could not deny, because they saw them.

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2. Another prejudice against his extraction, was the meanness of his parents and breeding. This you find mentioned, Matth. xiii. 54, 55. "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary; and his brethren James and Joses, and Simon and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? whence then hath this man these things? and they were offended in him." And so likewise, John vii. 15. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?"

A strange prejudice and most unreasonable. They could not believe him to be an extraordinary person, because his parents and relations, his birth and breeding were so mean. He had been brought up to a trade, and not brought up to learning: whereas in reason, this ought to have been an argument just the other way; that he was an extraordinary person, and divinely assisted, who all on the sudden, without the help and assistance of education, gave such evidence of his great wisdom and knowledge, and did such mighty works. This could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean; therefore there must be something extraordinary and divine in it. Thus another man, who had been free from prejudice, would have reasoned.

3. The most unreasonable prejudice of all, in respect of his extraction, was grounded upon a spiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our SAVIOUR was brought up, and they supposed him to be born; and that was Galilee. John i. 46. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And John vii. 41. "Shall the MESSIAS come out of Galilee?" And ver. 52. "Search and look, for our of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

But it seems Nathanael, who was a good man, was easily taken off from this common prejudice, when Philip said to him, "come and see." He bids him come and see the works he did, and then refers it to him, whether he would believe his own eyes, or an old proverb: however it seems the Jews laid great weight upon it, as if this alone were enough to conclude all his miracles, and after they had shot this bolt at him; the business were concluded clearly against him. But prudent and considerate men do not use to give much credit to ill-natur'd proverbs; the good or bad characters which are given of countries are not understood to be universally true, and without exception. There is no place but hath brought forth some brave spirits, and excellent persons; whatever the general temper and disposition of the inhabitants may be. Among the Grecians, the Boeotians were esteem'd a dull people, even to a proverb; and yet Pindar, one of their chief poets, was one of them. The Scythians were a barbarous nation, and one would have thought no good could have come from hence; and yet that country yielded Anacharsis an eminent philosopher. The Idumeans were aliens, and strangers to the covenant; and yet Job, one of the best men that ever was, came from thence. God can raise up eminent persons from any place; Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and an idolatrous people. Nay, as our SAVIOUR tells us, "he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham." The wise God, in the government of the world, does not tie himself to our foolish proverbs. It is not necessary to make a man a prophet, that he should be bred in a good air. If God sends a man, it matters not from what place he comes.

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Secondly, another head of exception against our SAVIOUR, was the meanness of his outward condition, so contrary to the universal expectation of the Jews. The Jews, from the tradition of their fathers, to which they (as the church of Rome does at this day,) paid a greater reverence than to the written word of GOD, were possessed with a strong persuasion, that the MESSIAS, whom they expected, was to be a great prince and conqueror, and to subdue all nations to them; so that nothing could be a greater defeat to their expectations, than the mean and low condition, in which our SAVIOUR appeared; so that upon this account they were almost universally offended at him.

But this prejudice was very unreasonable. For neither did their prophets foretell any such thing, as the temporal greatness of the MESSIAS: but on the contrary most expressly, that "he should be despised" "and rejected of men," that "he should be a man of sorrows and sufferings," and at last "be put to death;" which was directly contrary to what they expected from their ill-grounded tradition.

Thirdly, against his miracles they made these two exceptions.

I. That he wrought them by magical skill, and by the power of the devil.

Which was so exorbitantly unreasonable and malicious, that our SAVIOUR pronounceth it to be an "unpardonable sin," and for answer to it, appeals to every man's reason, whether it was likely "that the devil should conspire against himself, and assist any man to overthrow his own kingdom?" for it was plain, our SAVIOUR's doctrine was directly

contrary

contrary to the devil's design; and therefore to assist him to work miracles for the confirmation of it, must have been apparently against his own interest, and to the ruin of his own kingdom.

2. They pretended that though he did many great works, yet he gave them no sign from heaven. Matth. xvi. 1. It is said, "they desired him to shew them a sign from heaven." It seems they expected that God should give some immediate testimony to him from heaven; as he did to Elias, when fire came down from heaven, and consumed his enemies; and particularly they expected, that when he was upon the cross, if he were the true MESSIAS, he should have come down and saved himself: and because he did not answer their expectation in this, they concluded him an impostor.

Now what could be more unreasonable? when he had wrought so many other, and great miracles, perversly to insist upon some particular kind of miracle which they fancied? as if God were bound to gratify the curiosity of men; and as if our SAVIOUR were not as much "declared to be the SON of GOD, by rising again from the dead," as if he had "come down from the cross.

Fourthly, as to his conversation, they had these three exceptions.

1. That he used no severity in his habit or diet, took too much freedom, as they thought; "came eating and drinking;" that is, he freely used the creatures of God, for the end for which they were given, with temperance and thanksgiving; and did not lay those rigorous restraints upon himself in these matters, which many, that were esteemed the most religious among them, used to do.

But

But he plainly shews them, that this exception was meerly out of their prejudice against him. For if he had come in the way of austerity, they would have rejected him as well. They were resolved to find fault with him, whatever he did. Matth. xi. 16. "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? John the baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a devil." He lived in a more austere and melancholy way, "he came in the way of righteousness," used great strictness and severity in his habit and diet, and this they took exception at. Our SAVIOUR was of a quite contrary temper, and that did not please them neither. "The son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, behold a wine-bibber, and a glutton." So that let our SAVIOUR have done what he would, he could not have carried himself so, as to have escaped the censures of men, so peevishly and perversely disposed.

2. That he kept company with publicans and sinners.

To which exception nothing can be more reasonable than our SAVIOUR's own answer; that he was sent to be a physician to the world, "to call sinners to repentance;" and therefore they had no reason to be angry, or think it strange, if he conversed with his patients among whom his proper employment lay.

3. They objected to him profaneness in breaking the sabbath, and that surely was plain, that "he could not be of God, if he kept not the sabbath-day." The truth was, he had healed one on the sabbath-day.

To this our SAVIOUR gives a most reasonable and satisfactory answer, that surely "it was lawful to do

"good

“good on the sabbath-day;” that that was but a positive institution, but works of mercy are natural and moral duties; and God himself had declared, that he would have even his own institutions to give way to those greater duties, that are of natural and eternal obligation. “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” And then from the end of the sabbath; the sabbath was made for the rest and refreshment of man; and therefore could not be presumed to be intended to his prejudice. “The sabbath was made for man: and not man for the sabbath.”

Fifthly, another great prejudice against him, was, that persons of the greatest knowledge and authority among them, did not embrace his doctrine. John vii. 48. “Have any of the rulers or pharisees believed on him?” so that here was the infallible rule and authority of their church against him.

There is no doubt, but the example and authority of our guides ought to sway very much with us, and overrule us in doubtful cases; but not against plain and convincing evidence; there we ought to follow, “and obey God rather than men.” There is sometimes a visible and palpable corruption in those who are to lead us; they may have an interest to oppose the truth: and thus it was with the pharisees and rulers at that time; and so it hath been among christians in the great degeneracy of the Roman church. The christian religion was never more endangered, nor ever more corrupted, than by those who have been in greatest authority in that church, who ought to have understood religion best, and have been the principal support of it. “Men may err: but God cannot.” So that when God sends a prophet, or by his word does plainly declare his

SER M. his will to us, humane example and authority ceaseth,
 CXVII. and is of no force.

The last prejudice I shall mention, which the Jews had against our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, was, that it did abolish and supersede their religion, as of no longer use and continuance; though it was plain it was instituted by God.

This had been a very specious pretence indeed, had not this been part of their religion, and had not their own prophets foretold, that the MESSIAS should come and perfect what was wanting and defective in their institution. It is expressly said in their law, "that God would raise unto them another prophet, like to Moses, and that they should hear him," when he came. So that in truth it was the accomplishment of all those revelations which were made to the Jews, and did not reprove the Jewish religion as false, but as imperfect: and did not contradict and overthrow; but "perfect and fulfil the law and the prophets."

And thus I have gone over the chief exceptions and offences which the Jews took at our SAVIOUR and his doctrine; and I hope sufficiently shewn the unreasonableness of them. I have not now time to proceed to what remains: but by what hath been said, you may easily see, upon what slight and unreasonable grounds men may be prejudiced against the best person and things, and yet be very confident all the while that they are in the right. For so no doubt many of the Jews, who opposed our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, thought themselves to be. Therefore it concerns us to put on meekness, and humility, and modesty, that we may be able to judge impartially of things, and our minds may be preserved

reserved free and indifferent to receive the truths of God, when they are offer'd to us: otherwise self-conceit and passion will so blind our minds, and bias our judgments, that we shall be unable to discern, and unwilling to entertain the plainest and most evident truths. We see here by the sad example of the Jews, that by giving way to passion, and cherishing pride and self-conceit, men may be so deeply prejudiced against the truth, as to resist the clearest light, and reject even salvation it self, when it is offer'd to them. So that it is not in vain, that the scripture saith, "let every man be swift to hear, and slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;" and exhorts us so earnestly, "to receive with meekness the word of God, which is able to save our souls."

S E R M O N CXVIII.

*The prejudices against christianity
consider'd.*

M A T T H. xi. 6.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

I Have from these words propounded to consider S E R M.
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two things.

I. Those prejudices and objections which the world had against our SAVIOUR and his religion The first
sermon on
this text.
at their first appearance; as also to enquire into

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those

those which men at this day do more especially insist upon, against the christian religion; and to shew the unreasonableness of them.

II. How happy a thing it is to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men have against religion.

I have entred upon the first of these, the prejudices which the world had against our SAVIOUR and his religion. When this great teacher of mankind came from GOD, though he gave all imaginable testimony and evidence that he was sent from heaven; yet the greatest part of the world, both Jews and Gentiles, were mightily offended at him, and deeply prejudiced against him and his doctrine; but not both upon the same account.

I have already given you an account of the chief exceptions which the Jews made against our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, and have shewn the unreasonableness of them.

I proceed now to consider the principal of those exceptions, which the Gentiles and heathen philosophers took at our SAVIOUR and his doctrine. I shall mention these four.

First, that christianity was a great innovation, and contrary to the received institutions of the world.

Secondly, they objected against the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine.

Thirdly, that it wanted demonstration.

Fourthly, that the low and suffering condition of our SAVIOUR was unsuitable to one that pretended to be the SON of GOD, and to be appointed by him for a teacher and reformer of the world. These are the chief exceptions which the heathen, and especially their philosophers, took at our SAVIOUR and his doctrine.

First

First, that the christian religion was a great innovation, and contrary to the received institutions of the world; and consequently that it did condemn the religion which had been so universally received and establish'd in the world by so long a continuance of time. And no wonder if this made a great impression upon them, and rais'd a mighty prejudice in the minds of men against the christian religion; no prejudices being so strong as those that are fix'd in the minds of men by education: and of all the prejudices of education, none so violent and hard to be removed, as those about religion, yea though they be never so groundless and unreasonable. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods?" intimating to us, that men are very hardly brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, how absurd soever it be. When christianity was first propounded to the heathen world, had men been free and indifferent, and not prepossess'd with other apprehensions of God and religion; it might then have been expected from them, that they should have entertain'd it with a readiness of mind proportionable to the reasonableness of it. But the case was quite otherwise, the world had for many ages been brought up to another way of worship, and inur'd to rites and superstitions of a quite different nature. And this sways very much with men; *sequimur majores nostros, qui feliciter sequuti sunt suos*; as one of the heathens said in those days, "we follow our ancestors, who happily follow'd theirs;" men are hardly brought to condemn those opinions and customs in religion, which themselves and their forefathers have always embraced

and followed. And wise men especially are loth to admit so great a change in a matter of so great a concernment as religion is. So that this must be acknowledged to have been a considerable prejudice against the christian religion at its first appearance. But yet upon a thorough examination, this will not be found sufficient in reason to withhold men from embracing christianity, if we consider these four things.

1. No prudent person thinks, that the example and custom of his forefathers obligeth him to that which is evil in itself, and pernicious to him that does it; and there is no evil, no danger equal to that of a false religion; for that tends to the ruin of mens souls, and their undoing for ever. A man might better alledge the example of his forefathers to justify his errors and follies in any other kind, than in this, which is so infinitely pernicious in the consequences of it.

2. In a great corruption and degeneracy, it is no sufficient reason against a reformation, that it makes a change. When things are amiss, it is always fit to amend and reform them; and this cannot be done without a change. The wisest among the heathens did acknowledge, that their religion was mixt with very great follies and superstitions, and that the lives and manners of men were extremely corrupt and degenerate; and they endeavour'd, as much as they could, and durst, to reform these things. And therefore there was no reason to oppose an effectual reformation, for fear of a change; a change of things for the better, tho' it be usually hard to be effected, being always a thing to be desired and wished for.

3. The change which christianity design'd, was the least liable to exception that could be, being no-
thing

hing else in the main of it, but the reducing of natural religion, the bringing of men back to such apprehensions of God, and such a way of worshipping him, as was most suitable to the divine nature, and to the natural notions of mens minds ; nothing else but a design to persuade men of the one true God, maker of the world, that he is a spirit, and to be worshipped in such a manner as is suitable to his spiritual nature. And then for matters of practice, to bring men to the obedience of those precepts of temperance, and justice, and charity, which had been universally acknowledged even by the heathens themselves to be the great duties which men owe to themselves and others. And that this is the main design of the christian religion, the apostle hath told us in most plain express words, Tit. ii. 11, 12. "The grace of God, (that is, the doctrine of the gospel) which hath appeared to all men, and brings salvation, teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world."

And all that the christian religion adds beyond this, is means and helps for our direction, and assistance, and encouragement in the discharge and performance of these duties. For our direction, God hath sent his Son in our nature, to declare his will to us, and to be a pattern of holiness and virtue. For our assistance, he hath promised the aids of his HOLY SPIRIT; and for our encouragement, he offers to us pardon of sin in the blood of his Son, and eternal life and happiness in another world. This is a short sum and abridgment of the christian religion, and there is nothing of all this that can reasonably be excepted against.

4. GOD, considering the prejudice of the heathens against christianity, by reason of their education in a contrary religion, was strong and violent, was pleased to give such evidence of the truth of christianity, as was of proportionable strength and force to remove and conquer this prejudice. He was pleased to give testimony to the first founder of this religion by mighty miracles, and particularly by his resurrection from the dead: but because the report of these things was only brought to the heathen world, and they had not seen the things themselves; therefore he enabled those who were the witnesses of these things to the world, to work as great miracles as he had done. And when they saw those who gave testimony to our SAVIOUR's miracles, do as great and strange things themselves, as they testified of him, there was no reason any longer to doubt of the truth of their testimony. So that though the prejudice of the heathen against christianity was very great, yet the evidence which GOD gave to it, was strong enough to remove it. The doctrine of christianity was such as might have recommended itself to impartial men, by its own reasonableness: but meeting with violent prejudices in those to whom it was offer'd, GOD was pleased to give such a confirmation to it, as was sufficient to bear down those prejudices.

Secondly, another objection against christianity, was the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine. They expected some deep speculations in natural or moral philosophy; they made full account, a teacher sent from heaven would have instructed them in the profoundest points, and discours'd to them about the first principles of things, and the nature of the soul, and

and the chief end of man, with a subtilty and eloquence infinitely beyond that of their greatest sophisters, and able to bear down all opposition and contradiction: but instead of this, they are told a plain story of the life and miracles of JESUS CHRIST, and of his dying upon the cross, and rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven; and a few plain precepts of life; and all this deliver'd without any ornaments of art, or insinuation of eloquence, to gain the favour and applause of those to whom they related these things.

But now, this truly consider'd, is so far from being any real objection against the christian doctrine, that it is one of the greatest commendations that can be given of it: for matter of fact ought to be related in the most plain, and simple, and unaffected manner; and the less art and eloquence is used in the telling of a story, the more likely it is to gain belief. And as for our SAVIOUR's precepts how plain soever they might be, I am sure they are a collection of the most excellent and reasonable rules of a good life, and the freest from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in the world. And can any thing be more worthy of GOD, and more likely to proceed from him, than so plain and useful a doctrine as this? The language of law is not wont to be fine and persuasive, but short, and full of authority. Thus it is among men: and surely it is much fitter for GOD to speak thus to men, than for men to one another.

Thirdly, it is objected, that the doctrine of our SAVIOUR and his apostles wanted demonstration; they seemed to impose too much upon the understandings of men, and to deliver things too magisterially,

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gisterially, not demonstrating things from intrinsic arguments, but requiring belief and assent without proof.

This the apostle St. Paul readily acknowledgeth, that in preaching the gospel to the world, they did not proceed in the way of the heathen orators and philosophers, 1 Cor. iv. 4. "My speech and my preaching was not in the enticing words of man's wisdom: but in demonstration of the SPIRIT and of power;" that is, they did not go in the way of humane eloquence and demonstration: but yet their doctrine did not want its evidence and demonstration, though of another kind. They did not go about to bewitch men by eloquence, not to entangle their minds by subtle reasonings, the force of which very few are capable of: but they offered to men a sensible proof and demonstration of the truth of what they delivered, in those strange and miraculous operations, to which they were enabled by the HOLY GHOST. And this was a sensible evidence, even to the meanest capacity, of a divine assistance going along with them, and giving testimony to them. I appeal to any man, whether the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead, and his ascending into heaven, be not a clearer demonstration of another life after this, and more level to the capacities of all mankind, than the finest and subtlest arguments that can be drawn from the immaterial nature of the soul, its power of reflexion upon itself, and independency upon body as to some of its operations; which yet are some of the chiefest arguments that philosophy affords, to prove the immortality of our souls.

Fourthly, the heathens objected, that the low and mean condition our SAVIOUR was unsuitable to one that

that pretended to be the SON of GOD, and to be appointed by GOD to be a teacher and reformer of the world. This to the heathen philosophers did not only appear unreasonable, but even ridiculous. So St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. i. 23. "We preach CHRIST crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" to think that a man who appeared in such mean circumstances, should be able to reform the world; and one who himself was put to death, should be relied upon for life and immortality.

This objection I have heretofore consider'd at large, and therefore shall now speak but very briefly to it.

Besides those excellent reasons and ends which the scripture assigns of our SAVIOUR's humiliation; as that he might be a teacher and example to us; that he might make expiation for our sins; that by suffering himself, he might learn to commiserate us; that "by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and might deliver those who through fear of death were all their lives subject to bondage;" I say, besides these, it was of great use that he should live in so mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride, and vanity and fantasy of the world; and to convince men of these two great truths, that GOD may love those whom he afflicts; and that men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented in the midst of poverty, and reproach, and suffering. Had our blessed SAVIOUR been a great temporal prince, his influence and example might possibly have made more hypocrites and servile converts; but would not have persuaded men one jot more to be inwardly good and virtuous. The great argument which must do

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that, must be fetch'd, not from the pomp and prosperity of this world, but from the eternal happiness and misery of the other. Besides, had he appear'd in any great power and splendor, the christian religion could not have been so clearly acquitted from the suspicion of a worldly interest and design, which would have been a far greater objection against it, than this which I am now speaking to.

Add to all this, that the wisest of the heathen philosophers did teach, that worldly greatness and power are not to be admired, but despised by a truly wise man; that men may be virtuous, and good, and dearly beloved of God, and yet be liable to great miseries and sufferings; and that whoever suffers unjustly, and bears it patiently, gives the greatest testimony to goodness, and does most effectually recommend virtue to the world; that a good man under the hardest circumstances of misery, and reproach, and suffering, is the fittest person of all other to be the minister, and apostle, and preacher of God to mankind: and surely they who say such things (which the heathens have done) had no reason to object to our blessed SAVIOUR his low and suffering condition.

As to that part of the objection, that he who promis'd immortality to others could not save himself from death and suffering, considering that he who was put to death, rescu'd himself from the power of the grave: it is so far from being ridiculous, that nothing can be more reasonable than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who by rising from the grave, and conquering death, gave a plain demonstration that he was able to make good what he promised.

I have

I have done with the exceptions which were made SERM.
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against our SAVIOUR and his doctrine at their first
appearance in the world. I proceed in the

II^d Place to consider the prejudices and objections
which men at this day do more particularly insist
upon, against our SAVIOUR and his religion: and
they are many.

First, some that relate to the incarnation of our
SAVIOUR.

Secondly, to the time of his appearance.

Thirdly, that we have not now sufficient evidence
of the truth of christianity; the main arguments for
it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this di-
stance, we have not, nor can be expected to have,
sufficient assurance.

Fourthly, that the terms of it seem very hard,
and to lay too great restraints upon humane nature.

Fifthly, that it is apt to dispirit men, and to
break the vigour and courage of their minds.

Sixthly, the divisions and factions that are among
christians.

Seventhly, the wicked lives of the greatest part of
the professors of christianity. In answer to all which,
I do not propose to say all that may be said, but as
briefly as I can to offer so much, as may, if not give
full satisfaction, yet be sufficient to break the force
of them, and to free the minds of men from any
great perplexity about them.

As to the first, which relates to the incarnation of
our SAVIOUR; and the second to the time of his ap-
pearance; I know that these and most of the rest I
have mention'd, were urg'd by the heathen against
christianity: but they are now more especially in-
sisted upon both by the secret and open enemies of
our religion.

The objections against his incarnation I have else-
where * consider'd: and therefore shall proceed to
the next, viz.

Secondly, as to the time of our SAVIOUR's appearance, it is objected, if he be the only way and means of salvation, why did he come no sooner into the world; but suffer mankind so long without any hopes or means of being saved? this was objected by Porphyry of old, and still sticks in the minds of men. To this I answer.

1. It is not fit for creatures to call their creator to too strict an account of his actions. Goodness is free, and may act when and how it pleaseth; and "as God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," so he may have mercy at what time he pleaseth, and is not bound to give us an account of his matters. This is much like the objection of the atheist against the being of God; that if there were such an infinite and eternal being, he would surely have made the world sooner, and not have been without all employment for so long a duration: such another objection is this against our SAVIOUR, that if he had been the SON of God, he would have begun this great and merciful work of the redemption of mankind sooner, and not have delay'd it so long, and suffer'd mankind to perish for four thousand years together.

But it seems in the one as well as the other, God took his own time, and he best knew what time was fittest. The scripture tells us, that "in the fulness of time, God sent his SON": when things were ripe for it, and all things accomplish'd that God thought requisite in order to it. In judging of the actions of
our

our earthly governors, those who are at a distance SERM.
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from their counsels; what conjectures soever they
may make of the reasons of them, will nevertheless,
if they have that respect for their wisdom which
they ought, believe, that how strange soever some of
their actions may seem, yet they were done upon
good reason, and that they themselves, if they knew
the secrets of their counsels, should think so. Much
more do we owe that reverence to the infinite wis-
dom of GOD, to believe that the counsels of his will
are grounded upon very good reason, tho' we do not
see many times what it is.

2. It is not true that the world was wholly desti-
tute of a way and means of salvation before our
SAVIOUR'S coming. Before the law of Moses was
given, men were capable of being received to the mercy
and favour of GOD, upon their obedience to the law of
nature, and their sincere repentance for the violation
of it, by virtue of "the lamb that was slain from
the foundation of the world." Men were saved
by CHRIST both before and under the law, without
any particular and express knowledge of him. There
were good men in other nations, as well as among
the Jews, as Job, and his friends also, seem to have
been. In all ages of the world, and "in every
nation, they that feared GOD and wrought righte-
ousness were accepted of him." The sacrifice of
CHRIST which is the meritorious cause of the sal-
vation of mankind, looks back as well as forward;
and GOD was reconcilable to men, and their sins were
pardon'd, by virtue of this great propitiation that was
to be made. In which sense perhaps it is, that
CHRIST is said to be "the lamb slain from the
foundation of the world," Heb. ix. 25, 26. The
apostle

apostle intimates to us, that if this sacrifice which was offered in the last ages of the world, had not been available in former ages, "CHRIST must have
 " often suffer'd since the foundation of the world:
 " but now hath he appeared once in the conclusion
 " of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of
 " himself."

3. He did appear at that time in which the world stood most in need of him; when the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles, were sunk into the greatest degeneracy both in opinion and practice, and the condition of mankind seem'd to be even desperate and past remedy. This was the needful time, when it was most seasonable for this great physician to come, and shew his pity and his skill in our recovery. GOD could have sent his SON many ages before; but he thought fit to try other ways first, and to reserve this powerful remedy to the last; "last of all he
 " sent his SON."

4. The time of our SAVIOUR's appearing was of all ages of the world the fittest season for his coming; whether we consider,

1. That the world was at that time best prepared and disposed for receiving the christian religion: or

2. That this was the fittest season that ever had been, for the easy diffusing and propagating of this religion. I assign these reasons as tending to give men some satisfaction, why this great blessing was delay'd so long; it being rather an argument of wisdom and goodness, than of the want of either to defer things to that time, in which they are most likely to have their effect. Not but that perhaps other and better reasons may be given. To be sure GOD had very good reasons for this dispensation

tion, whether we can hit upon them or not. In the mean time these seem not to be altogether inconsiderable.

1. That the world was at that time best prepared and disposed for receiving the christian religion. All the while our SAVIOUR's coming was delay'd, God's providence was disposing things for it, and training up mankind for the entertaining of this great blessing. The jewish religion was always very burdensome, but much more towards the expiration of the jewish state, partly by the intolerable multitude of external observances, which were daily multiplied upon them, under pretence of traditions from their fathers; and partly by reason of their subjection to the Romans, which made the exercise of their religion in many respects more difficult.

And the heathen world was in a very good measure prepared for christianity, by being civiliz'd. About the time of our SAVIOUR's coming into the world, philosophy and learning had been so diffus'd by the Roman conquests, as had brought a great part of the world from barbarism to civility. Besides that their philosophy had this effect upon men, to refine their reason, and in a good degree to detect the follies of the heathen idolatry and superstition. 'Tis true indeed learning and philosophy flourish'd a great while before, in the time of the Grecian empire, and perhaps before that in some other nations; and the conquests of the Grecians were very speedy and of vast extent: but yet they were neither so universal, nor so well settled; nor did they propagate their philosophy and civility together with their conquests, as the Romans did. So that there was no age of the world, wherein mankind were so generally

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rally prepared and disposed for the receiving of the gospel, as that wherein our SAVIOUR appeared.

2. This was likewise the fittest season for the easy diffusing and propagating of the christian religion. The Romans, together with their conquests, did very much propagate their language, which made the ways of communication far more easy; and by the long and frequent correspondence of the several parts of that empire one with another, the ways of travel and passage from one country to another were more ready and open. So that no age can be instantane'd, in all respects so convenient for the speedy propagating of a new religion, as that wherein our SAVIOUR appear'd, viz. when the Roman empire was at its height. And it was very agreeable to the goodness and wisdom of the divine providence, that the bravest and most virtuous people in the world (infinitely beyond either the Persians and Grecians) should be chosen by GOD, as one of the chiefest means for the spreading of the best and most perfect revelation that ever GOD made to the world.

Thirdly, it is objected, that we have not now sufficient evidence of the truth of christianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which at this distance, we have not, nor can be suppos'd to have, sufficient assurance. To this answer,

1. That men not only may have, but have an undoubted assurance of matters of fact, ancienter than these we are speaking of; and the distance of them from our times creates no manner of scruple in the minds of men concerning them. That there was such a man as Alexander the great, and that he conquer'd Darius and the Persians; that Julius

Cæsar

Cæsar invaded our nation, and in some measure subdued it; and that he overcame Pompey in the battle of Pharsalia; and innumerable other things which I might instance in, that were done before our SAVIOUR'S time, are firmly believ'd without any manner of doubt and scruple by mankind, notwithstanding they were done so long ago. So that ancient matters of fact are capable of clear evidence, and we may have sufficient assurance of them. And where there is equal evidence, if we do not give equal belief, the fault is not in the argument, but in the passion or prejudice of those to whom it is proposed.

2. We have every whit as great assurance, (nay greater if it can, or needed to be) of the matters upon which the proof of christianity relies, as of those which I have mention'd. The matters of fact, upon which the truth of christianity relies, are, that there was such a person as JESUS CHRIST; that he wrought such miracles; that he was put to death at Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate; that he rose again from the dead, and was visibly taken up into heaven; that he bestowed miraculous gifts and powers upon the apostles, to make them competent witnesses of his resurrection, and of the truth of that doctrine which they publish'd in his name; that accordingly they preach'd the gospel to the world, and in a short space without any humane advantages did propagate it, and gain entertainment for it in most parts of the then known world.

Now these matters of fact have the same testimony of histories, wrote in those times, and conveyed down to us, by as general and uncontroled a tradition, as the conquests of Alexander, and Julius

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Cæsar. So that if we do not afford equal belief to them, it is a sign that we have some prejudice or interest against the one, more than against the other, though the evidence for both be equal. Nay, I go farther, that the evidence for these things which are the foundation of christianity, is so much the greater, because that which depended upon it, was of far greater concernment to the world, and consequently mankind were more obliged to search more narrowly into it.

For our SAVIOUR's life, and death, and resurrection, we have the testimony of a great number of eye-witnesses, who have wrote the history of these things. And though they were truly extraordinary persons, and gave testimony to themselves by miracles; yet at present I desire no more, but that they be looked upon, as knowing and honest relators of what they heard and saw; and that the same credit be given to them, which we give to Livy, and Ariano and Q. Curtius, for plain events, and matters of fact.

But yet I must add withal, that besides the miracles which they wrought, they gave greater testimony of their integrity, than any historian in the world ever did. For they willingly suffer'd the greatest persecution and torment, yea and death itself in confirmation of the truth of what they deliver'd. And for the propagating of the christian religion through so great a part of the world, it is evident by the effect beyond all denial.

So that for the matters of fact, upon which the truth of christianity does depend, here is greater and more advantageous evidence of history, than for any other matter of equal antiquity whatsoever.

3. As to the substance of these matters of fact, we have the concurring testimony of the greatest enemies of the christian religion. That there were such persons as our SAVIOUR and his apostles, that they preached such a doctrine, that they wrought such miracles; for this we have the acknowledgment of the Jews, and the testimony of the heathen historians, and particularly of Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, who were the particular and most learned adversaries of the christian religion. So that as to the matters of fact, there is no objection against them, whatever use we may make of them, or whatever consequences we may draw from them. And I presume agreed by all objectors, that if these matters of fact be true, they are a sufficient foundation of the truth of our religion, and we are very unequal to our religion, if we make a doubt of these things, which the greatest enemies of christianity never had the face to deny.

1. And besides all this, to recompense the disadvantage which we have of those who saw the miracles of our SAVIOUR and his apostles, we have the *testimonium rei*, the evidence of the effects of these things to confirm our belief of them; and this is an advantage which the first ages of christianity could not have. We see our SAVIOUR's predictions of the success of his religion in the world, in the propagating and establishing of it fully accomplish'd, notwithstanding the fierce opposition and resistance that was made against it by the greatest powers of the world. We see the dispersion of the Jews in all nations, and the misery and contempt which they every where suffer; and that now for above sixteen hundred years, they have continued a distinct people,

and a spectacle of the divine justice and severity, for rejecting and crucifying the SON of GOD, and for a lasting and standing testimony of the truth of our SAVIOUR's prediction, and of the christian religion.

So that though we live at this distance from the rise and beginning of christianity; yet we have the relation of those things, which give confirmation to it, conveyed down to us in as credible a manner, as any ancient matter of fact ever was; and the effects of things remaining to this day, do give testimony to the truth of it.

Fourthly, it is objected, that the terms of christianity seem very hard, and to lay too great restraints upon humane nature. It commands us to mortify our lusts, and subdue our passions, and "deny ungodliness, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world: to be holy in all manner of conversation; to have respect to whatever things are honest, and true, and just, and virtuous, and of good report; and to deny ourselves;" and to part with the dearest enjoyments of this life, "yea, and with life itself, for the sake of CHRIST, and his gospel." Now these seem to be very hard terms to forego all the present pleasures and enjoyments of this life, in hopes of a future happiness which we are less assur'd of.

To this I answer,

1. That this is a greater objection against religion in general, than the christian religion. For natural religion requires of us all the main duties that christianity does, and gives us far less assurance of the reward of our obedience. Natural religion requires piety, and justice, and charity, the due government of

our appetites and passions, as well as christianity SERM.
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does; but does not discover to us the rewards of
another world, by many degrees so clearly, as our
LORD and SAVIOUR, who hath "brought life and im-
"mortality to light by the gospel," and by his resur-
rection from the dead, and ascension into heaven,
hath given us full assurance of another life after this,
and of a glorious immortality. So that though we
have not, nor can have the evidence of sense, for a
future state, yet we have all the rational evidence
for it, that can be wish'd or expected; and much
more than men have for those adventures of
their lives and fortunes, which they frequently make
in the world, and think themselves reasonable in so
doing.

2. The restraints which christianity lays upon men,
are in the judgment of mankind so far from being
an objection against it, that they are highly to the
commendation of it. Nay, it were the greatest ob-
jection that could be against our religion, if it did
set us at liberty from those restraints. What can be
more to the credit of any religion than to command
men to be just, and charitable, and peaceable? and what
more to the advantage of the professors of it? and on
the contrary, what can reflect more upon any religion,
than to indulge and allow men in any vice contrary to
these? it shews men are glad to make any thing an
objection against christianity when they lay hold of
that, which if it had been otherwise, they would
have made ten times more clamour against it for the
contrary.

3. As for most of these restraints which christiani-
ty lays upon us, they are of that nature, so much
both for our private and publick advantage, that set-
ting

ting aside all considerations of religion, and of the rewards and punishments of another life, they are really good for us, and if God had not laid them upon us, we ought in reason, in order to our temporal benefit and advantage, to have laid them upon ourselves. If there were no religion, I know men would not have such strong and forcible obligations to these duties; but yet I say, though there were no religion, it were good for men, in order to temporal ends, to their health, and quiet, and reputation, and safety, in a word, to the private and publick prosperity of mankind, that men should be temperate, chaste, and just, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind, and obliging to one another, rather than the contrary. So that religion does not create those restraints arbitrarily, but requires those things of us, which our reason, and regard to our advantage, which the necessity and conveniency of the things themselves, without any consideration of religion, would in most cases urge us to.

4. As to the case of persecution for religion; besides that it does not now happen so frequently as it did in the beginning of christianity, nay very seldom in comparison, if all things be consider'd, it cannot be thought unreasonable, both because religion offers to us, in consideration of our present sufferings, a happiness unspeakably greater than that which we forego for the sake of religion; and because when it happens, God does extraordinarily enable men to go through it with courage and comfort, as we see in the examples of the primitive christians, who in great numbers of all tempers and ages, did voluntarily choose to give up themselves to these sufferings, when there was no necessity laid upon them, but

but fair terms of retreat were offer'd to them by their enemies. It is one thing when a man suffers by the law, and cannot help it; and another thing when men may avoid suffering. In the former case men submit to necessity, and bear it as well as they can; in the latter case, if men suffer, it is a sign they firmly believe the reward of it; and if they suffer cheerfully, and with joy, as most of the martyrs did, it is a plain evidence that God affords them extraordinary support in their sufferings; and then the case is not very hard, when religion puts them upon nothing, but what it gives them cause, and enables them, to rejoice in the doing of it.

Fifthly, it is objected; that the christian religion is apt to dispirit men, and to break the courage and vigor of their minds, by the precepts of patience, and humility, and meekness, and forgiving injuries, and the like. This objection hath made a great noise in the world, and hath been urged by men of great reputation, and a deep insight into the tempers of men, and affairs of the world. It is said to be particularly insisted upon by Machiavel, and very likely it may; though I think that elsewhere he is pleased to speak with terms of respect, not only of religion in general, but likewise of the christian religion; and (which seems very much to contradict the other) he says in the first book of his discourses upon Livy, (chap. xi.) that the greatness and success of Rome is chiefly to be ascribed to their piety and religion; and that Rome was more indebted to Numa Pompilius for settling religion among them, than to Romulus the founder of their state; and the reason he gives is much to our present purpose; for, says he, without religion there can be no military discipline, religion being

being the foundation of good laws and good discipline. And particularly he commends the Samnites, who betook themselves to religion, as their last and best remedy to make men courageous, nothing being more apt to raise mens spirits than religion.

But howsoever this objection be, I dare appeal both to reason and experience for the confutation of it.

I. To reason, and that as to these two things.

(I.) That the christian religion is apt to plant in the minds of men principles of the greatest resolution and truest courage. It teacheth men upon the best and most rational grounds to despise dangers, yea and death itself, the greatest and most formidable evil in this world ; and this principle is likely to inspire men with the greatest courage ; for what need he fear any thing in this world, who fears not death, after which there is nothing in this world to be feared ? and this the christian religion does, by giving men the assurance of another life, and a happiness, infinitely greater than any is to be enjoyed in this world. And in order to the securing of this happiness, it teacheth men to be holy, and just, and to exercise a good conscience both toward God and man, which is the only way to free a man from all inward and tormenting fears of what may happen to him after death. “ This makes “ the righteous man to be (as Solomon says) bold “ as a lion.” Nothing renders a man more undaunted as to death, and the consequences of it, than the peace of his own mind ; for a man not to be conscious to himself of having wilfully displeased him, who alone can make us happy or miserable in the

the other world. So that a good man, being secure of the favour of God, may upon that account reasonably hope for a greater happiness after death than other men: whereas a bad man, if he be sober, and have his senses awakened to a serious consideration of things, cannot but be afraid to die; and be extremely anxious and solicitous what will become of him in another world. And surely it would make the stoutest man breathing afraid to venture upon death, when he sees hell beyond it. Possibly there may be some monsters of men, who may have so far suppress'd the sense of religion, and stupified their consciences, as in a good measure to have conquer'd the fears of death, and of the consequences of it. But this happens but to very few, as the poet tells us in the person of an epicurean.

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,

Atque metus omnes Et inexorabile fatum

Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.

There are very few that attain to this temper, but at some times. So that if vice and wickedness do generally break the firmness of mens spirits; it remains, that nothing but religion can generally give men courage against death. And this the christian religion does eminently to those who live according to it; our blessed SAVIOUR having delivered us from the fear of death, by conquering death for us, and giving us assurance of the glorious rewards of another life.

(2.) Meekness, and patience, and humility, and modesty, and such virtues of christianity, do not in reason tend to dispirit men, and break their true courage, but only to regulate it, and take away the fierceness and brutishness of it. This we see in ex-

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perience, that men of the truest courage, have many times least of pride and insolence, of passion and fierceness. Those who are better bred, are commonly of more gentle and civil dispositions: but yet they do not therefore want true courage, though they have not the roughness and fool-hardiness of men of ruder breeding. So in a true christian, courage and greatness of mind, is very consistent with meekness, and patience, and humility. Not that all good men are very courageous; there is much of this in the natural temper of men, which religion does not quite alter. But that which I am concerned to maintain is, that christianity is no hindrance to mens courage, and that *cæteris paribus*, supposing men of equal tempers, no man hath so much reason to be valiant, as he that hath a good conscience, I do not mean a blustering, and boisterous, and rash courage; but a sober, and calm, and fixt valour.

2. I appeal to experience for the truth of this. Did ever greater courage and contempt of death appear in all ages, and sexes, and conditions of men, than in the primitive martyrs? were any of the heathen soldiers comparable to the christian legion, for resolution and courage, even the heathens themselves being judges? The religion of Mahomet seems to be contrived to inspire men with fierceness and desperation of resolution, and yet I do not find, but that generally where there hath been any equality for number, the christians have been superior to them in valour, and have given greater instances of resolution and courage, than the Turks have done. So that I wonder upon what grounds this objection hath been taken up against christianity, when there is nothing either in the nature of this religion, or from the

the experience of the world, to give any tolerable countenance to it. And surely the best way to know what effect any religion is likely to have upon the minds of men, is to consider what effects it hath had in the constant experience of mankind. There remains the other two objections, which I mention'd, but I must reserve them to another opportunity.

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The prejudices against JESUS and his religion consider'd.

M A T T H. xi. 6.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

FROM these words I propos'd to consider these two things. SERM.
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I. The prejudices and objections which the world at first had, and many still have, against our blessed SAVIOUR and his religion. The second
sermon on
this text.

II. That it is a great happiness to escape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion.

I have considered those objections which the Jews and heathen philosophers made against our SAVIOUR and his religion : and,

II. Those which at this day are insisted upon by the secret and open enemies of our religion. And I mention'd seven, the two last of which I shall now speak to.

Sixthly, it is objected that there are many divisions and factions among christians. This I confess is a great reproach and scandal to our religion: but no sufficient argument against it. And,

1. To lessen and abate the force of this objection, it is to be consider'd, that a very great part of the divisions that are among those that are call'd christians, are about things that do not concern the essentials of christianity, and therefore they are no argument that christianity is not true, because they bring no suspicion of doubt and uncertainty upon the fundamentals of christianity, which all agree in, though they differ in other things. 'Tis true indeed they are very undecent, and contrary to the nature and precepts of the christian religion, which above any religion in the world does strictly require love and unity. They take off much from the strength and beauty of religion: but do by no means destroy the truth of it.

2. How many and great soever they may be, yet they can with no colour of reason be imputed to the christian religion, as giving any cause or encouragement to them, however by accident it may be the occasion of them. For no man doubts but that the best things in the world may be perverted by bad men, and made an occasion of a great deal of mischief in the world, and yet be very innocent of all that mischief. No man can deny but that christianity does strictly enjoin love, and peace, and unity among all the members of that profession; and as far as christians are factious and unpeaceable, so far they are no christians. So that a man may as well except against philosophy, because of the differences that were among the philosophers, and say there was

no truth among them, because they were not all agreed in all things; as call the truth of christianity in question, for the differences that are among christians. Nay, a man might every whit as well except against laws and government; because, notwithstanding them, there are frequent seditions and rebellions, infinite suits and controversies occasion'd even by the very laws: but no man was ever so unreasonable as to think this a good reason against laws and government.

3. The divisions of christians are so far from being an argument against christianity, that on the contrary, they are an argument that men should embrace christianity more heartily, and make more conscience of obeying the precepts of it. And if they did this, the greatest part of those contentions and uncharitable animosities which are among them would presently cease. If the christian religion were truly entertained, and men did seriously mind the precepts of it, and give up themselves to the obedience of its laws, differences would not be easily commenced, nor so vehemently prosecuted, nor so pertinaciously continued in, as they are. Men would not, upon every slight reason, and little doubt and scruple, rend and tear the body of CHRIST in pieces, and separate themselves from the communion of the church they live in, and in which they were baptized and received their christianity.

If men seriously consider'd, and truly understood what they do, when they divide the church of CHRIST upon little scruples and pretences, they would hardly be able to think themselves christians, whilst they continued in these unchristian and uncharitable practices.

If

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If men would but be, or do what christianity requires, there would be no occasion for this objection; and if men will not, christian religion is not to be blamed for it, but those that act so contrary to the plain precepts and directions of it. I proceed to the

Seventh and last objection, the vicious and wicked lives of a great part of the professors of christianity. This is a heavy objection indeed, and such an one, that though we may justly be ashamed to own the truth of it, yet can we not have the face to deny it. 'Tis so sad a truth, that it is enough to confound us, and to fill all our faces with shame and blushing: but yet it is an objection not so strong against christianity, as it is shameful to christians. And notwithstanding the utmost force of it, we have no cause to be ashamed of the gospel of CHRIST; but the gospel of CHRIST may justly be ashamed of us. For whatever we be, "the gospel of CHRIST is the power of God unto "salvation." The natural tendency of it is to reform and save men, and "the wrath of God is "therein revealed against all ungodliness and un- "righteousness of men, however they may detain "the truths of God in unrighteousness," and not suffer them to have their due and proper influence upon their hearts and lives.

But that I may give a more clear and particular answer to it, I desire you to attend to these following considerations.

1. It cannot be denied, but that christianity hath had once very great and marvellous effects upon the hearts and lives of men. And for this I appeal to the lives and manners of the primitive christians, for which we have not only the testimony of our

own

own books and writers, but even of the adversaries S E R M.
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of our religion. What reformation christianity at first

wrought in the manners of men, we have clear and full testimony, from what the apostles wrote concerning the several churches which they planted in several parts of the world. What hearty unity and affection there was among christians; even to that degree, as to make men bring in their private estates and possessions for the common support of their brethren, we may read in the history of the Acts of the apostles. The city of Corinth, by the account which Strabo gives of it, was a very vicious and luxurious place, as most in the world; and yet we see by St. Paul, what a strange reformation the christian religion made in the lives and manners of many of them; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the LORD JESUS, and by the SPIRIT of our God." And surely it is no small matter to reclaim men from such a profligate course of life. The apostle instanceth in crimes and vices of the first rate, from which yet he tells us many were cleansed and purified "by the name of the LORD JESUS, and the SPIRIT of God;" that is, by the power and efficacy of the christian doctrine, together with the co-operation of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT.

After the apostles, the ancient fathers, in their apologies for christianity, give us a large account of the great power and efficacy of the christian doctrine upon

upon the lives and manners of men. Tertullian tells the Roman governors, that their prisons were full of malefactors, committed for several crimes; but they were all heathens. *De vestris semper aestuat carcer,* "their prisons were thronged with criminals of their own religion:" but there were no christians to be found committed there for such crimes; *Nemo illic christianus, nisi hoc tantum,* &c. "There were no christians in their prisons, but only upon account of their religion." Or if there were any malefactors that had been christians, they left their religion when they fell into those enormities. And afterwards he adds, that if christians were irregular in their lives, they were no longer accounted christians, but were banish'd from their communion as unworthy of it. And they appealed to the heathens, what a sudden and strange change christianity had made in several of the most lewd, and vicious, and debauched persons, and what a visible reformation there presently appeared in the lives of the worst of men, after they had once entertained the christian doctrine.

And these testimonies are so much the stronger, because they are publick appeals to our adversaries, which it is not likely they who were so persecuted and hated as the christians were, would have had the confidence to have made, if they had not been notoriously true, even the enemies themselves being judges.

And that they were so, we have the confession of the heathens themselves. I shall produce two remarkable testimonies to this purpose, and one of them from the pen of one of the bitterest enemies that the christian religion ever had.

Pliny

Pliny, in his epistle to Trajan the emperor, gives SERM.
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him an account, "that having examined the christi-
"ans, setting aside the superstition of their way,
"he could find no fault; and that this was the
"sum of their error, that they were wont to meet
"before day, and sing a hymn to CHRIST, and
"to bind themselves by solemn oath or sacrament,
"not to any wicked purpose, but not to steal, nor
"rob, nor commit adultery, nor break their faith,
"nor detain the pledge." So that it seems the
sum of their error was, to oblige themselves in the
strictest manner against the greatest vices and crimes.
Which methinks is a great testimony from an ene-
my and a judge, one who would have been ready
to discover their faults, and had opportunity of en-
quiring into them.

My other witness is Julian the emperor and apo-
state, who in one of his epistles tells us, "the
"christians did severely punish sedition and im-
"piety." And afterwards exhorting the heathen
priests to all offices of humanity, and especially alms
towards the poor; he tells them, they ought to be
more careful in this particular, and to mend this fault;
"because (says he) the Galileans taking advantage
"of our neglect in this kind, have very much
"strengthened their impiety (for so he calls their
"religion) by being very intent upon these offices,
"and exemplary in their charity to the poor, where-
"by they gained many over to them."

And in his 49th epistle to Arfacius the high-
priest of Galatia, he recommends to him, among
other means for the advancement of paganism, the
building of hospitals, and great liberality to the
poor, not only of their own religion, but others.

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“ For, says he, it is a shame that the impious Galileans should not only maintain their own poor, but ours also; wherefore let us not suffer them to outdo us in this virtue.” Nothing but the force of truth could have extorted so full an acknowledgment of the great humanity and charity of the christians, from so bitter an enemy of our religion as Julian was. If he owned it, we may be sure it was very great and exemplary.

So that you see that the christian religion had a very great power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men when it first appeared in the world. And the true spirit and genius of any religion, the force of any institution is best seen in the primitive effects of it; before it be weakened and dispirited by those corruptions, which in time are apt to insinuate themselves into the best things. For all laws and institutions are commonly more vigorous, and have greater effects at first, than afterwards; and the best things are apt in time to degenerate and to contract foil and rust. And it cannot in reason be expected otherwise. So that though it be a thing to be bewailed, and by the greatest care and diligence to be resisted, yet it is not so extremely to be wonder’d at, if christianity, in the space of sixteen hundred years, hath abated much of its first strength and vigor.

Especially considering, there were several circumstances, that gave christianity mighty advantages at first, especially the miraculous powers which did accompany the first publication of the gospel; which must needs be full of conviction to those who saw the wonderful effects of it: the extraordinary operation of the SPIRIT of GOD upon the minds of men.

men, to dispose them to the receiving of it: the persecuted and suffering state that christians were generally in, which made those who embraced the profession to be generally serious and in good earnest in it, and kept up a continual heat and zeal in the minds of men for that religion which cost them so dear, and for which they suffer'd so much: and the fury of their enemies against it, did naturally inflame their love and kindness to one another; nothing being a greater endearment among men, than common sufferings in a common cause. So long as christians were not corrupted by secular interests; and by denying all for CHRIST, were free from covetousness and ambition, the great roots of all evil, the church of CHRIST, "though she was black, yet she was comely, and terrible as an army with banners;" she was all this while in an excellent posture to resist the temptations, and fight against the vices and corruptions of the world: but after the world broke in upon the church, and christianity was countenanced by the powers of the world, and water'd with secular preferments and encouragements, no wonder if the tares began to grow up with the wheat: then "iniquity began to abound, and the love of many began to grow cold." When the sun of prosperity began to shine upon the christian profession, then no wonder if the vermin bred and swarmed every where. When it grew creditable and advantageous for men to be christians, this must in all reason make a world of hypocrites and counterfeit professors.

These things, I reckon, must in reason make a mighty difference between the first ages of christianity, and those which have follow'd since; and

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no wonder, if the real fruits and effects of religion in these several states of christianity be very unequal. For prosperity and adversity made a wide difference in this matter. The persecution of any religion naturally makes the professors of it real; and the prosperity of it does as naturally allure and draw in hypocrites. Besides that even the best of men are more corrupted by prosperity than affliction.

But tho' christians were best under persecution, yet God did not think fit always to continue them in that state, because he would not tempt them and tire them out with perpetual sufferings; and after he had given the world a sufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of the christian religion, in maintaining and propagating it self in despite of all the violence and opposition of the world, sufficient for ever to give reputation to it; he then thought good to leave it to be kept up by more humane ways, and such as offer less violence to the nature of a man. Being once establish'd and settled in the world, and upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, God left it to be supported by more ordinary means; by pious education, and diligent instruction, and good laws and government, without miracles, and without persecution, and without those extraordinary and overpowering communications of his grace and SPIRIT which he afforded to the first ages of christianity.

I have insisted the longer upon this, that men may see what effects christianity hath had upon the lives of men, by which we may see the proper nature and efficacy of it; and withal may not wonder so much that it hath not the same effects now. Though it be matter of great shame to us, that
they

they are so vastly disproportionable to what they were at first.

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2. Though the disproportion be very great between the effects of christianity at first, and what it hath now upon the lives of men; yet we ought not to deny, but it hath still some good effects upon mankind; and it is our great shame and fault that it hath no better. If we will speak justly of things, as to the general civility of life and manners, freedom from tyranny, and barbarousness, and cruelty, and some other enormous vices; yea and as to the exemplary piety and virtue of great numbers of particular persons of several nations, there is no comparison between the general state of christendom, and the pagan and mahometan parts of the world. Next to christianity, and the law of Moses, (which was confined to one nation) philosophy was the most likely instrument to reform mankind that hath been in the world; and it had very considerable effects upon some particular persons, both as to the rectifying of their opinions, and the reforming of their lives: but upon the generality of mankind it did very little in either of these respects, especially as to the rectifying of the absurd and impious opinions of the people concerning God, and their superstitious worship of the deity. Whereas the christian religion did universally, wherever it came, set men free from those gross impieties and superstitions, and taught men to worship the only true God in a right manner.

Though we must confess to the eternal reproach of the christian religion, that the western church hath degenerated so far, that it seems to be in a great measure relaps'd into the ignorance and superstition

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stitution of paganism; out of which degeneracy, that God hath rescued us, we have infinite cause to adore his goodness, so we have all the reason in the world to dread and detest a return into this spiritual Egypt, this house of darkness and bondage, and the bringing of our necks again under "that yoke, which" neither we nor our fathers were able to bear."

So that you see that there are still very considerable effects of the christian religion in the world, yea and I doubt not but in those places where it is most corrupted and degenerated; because they still retain the essential doctrines of christianity, which have not quite lost their force, notwithstanding the many errors and corruptions that are mixt with them. And as God knows, and every man sees it, that the generality of christians are very bad, notwithstanding all the influence of that excellent religion which they profess; yet I think it is very evident, men would be much worse without it. For though very many who have entertained the principles of christianity are very wicked in their lives; yet many are otherwise: and those that are bad have this advantage by their religion, that it is in its nature apt to reduce and recover men from a wicked course, and sometimes does: whereas the case of those persons would have been desperate, were it not for those principles of religion which were implanted in them by christian education, and though they were long suppress'd, yet did at last awaken them to a consideration of their condition, and proved the happy means of their recovery.

3. I will not deny but there are some persons as bad, nay perhaps worse, that have been bred up in the christian religion, than are commonly to be found

found in the darkness of paganism; for the corruption of the best things is the worst, and those who have resisted so great a light as that of the gospel is, are like to prove the most desperately wicked of all others. There is nothing that men make worse use of, than of light and liberty, two of the best and most pleasant things in the world. Knowledge is many times abused to the worst purpose, and liberty into licentiousness and sedition; and yet no man for all that thinks ignorance desirable, or would wish a perpetual night and darkness to the world; and conclude from the inconveniencies of abused liberty, that the best state of things would be, that the generality of mankind should be all slaves to a few, and be perpetually chained to the oar, or condemned to the mines.

There are many times as bad consequences of good things, as of bad: but yet there is a great difference between good and bad for all that. As knowledge and liberty, so likewise the christian religion is a great happiness to the world in general, though some are so unhappy as to be the worse for it; not because religion is bad, but because they are so.

4. If religion be a matter of mens free choice, it is not to be expected that it should necessarily and constantly have its effects upon men; for it works upon us not by way of force or natural necessity, but of moral persuasion. If religion, and the grace of God which goes along with it, did force men to be good and virtuous, and no man could be so unless he were thus violently forced, then it would be no virtue in any man to be good, nor any crime and fault to be otherwise. For then the reason why some men were good, would be because

S E R M. cause they could not help it; and others bad, because
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 they would or not.

But religion does not thus work upon men. It directs men to their duty by the shortest and plainest precepts of a good life; it persuades men to the obedience of these precepts, by the promises of eternal happiness, and the threatnings of eternal misery in case of obstinate disobedience; it offers us the assistance of God's HOLY SPIRIT, to help our weakness, and enable us to that, for which "we are not sufficient of ourselves:" but there is nothing of violence or necessity in all this. After all, men may disobey these precepts, and not be persuaded by these arguments, may not make use of this grace which God offers, may "quench and resist the HOLY GHOST, and reject the counsel of God against themselves." And the case being thus, it is no wonder, if the temptations of this present world prevail upon the vicious inclinations of men against their duty, and their true interest; and consequently if the motives and arguments of the christian religion have not a constant and certain effect upon a great part of mankind. Not but that christianity is apt to bring men to goodness; but some are so obstinately bad, as not to be wrought upon by the most powerful considerations it can offer to them.

5. It cannot be denied, but that christianity is as well framed to make men good, as any religion can be imagined to be; and therefore wherever the fault be, it cannot be in the christian religion, that we are not good. So that the bad lives of christians are no sufficient objection either against the truth or
 good-

goodness of the christian doctrine. Besides the confirmation that was given to it by miracles, the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its divine and heavenly original. And surely the goodness of any religion consists in the sufficiency of its precepts to direct men to their duty; in the force of its arguments to persuade men to it; and the suitableness of its aids and helps to enable us to the discharge and performance of it. And all those advantages the christian religion hath above any religion or institution that ever was in the world. The reasonable and plain rules of a good life are no, where so perfectly collected, as in the discourses of our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles. No religion ever gave men so full assurance of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world; nor such gracious promises of divine assistance, and such evidence of it, especially in the piety, and virtue, and patience, and self-denial of the primitive christians, as the doctrine of GOD our SAVIOUR hath done, "which teacheth men to deny ungodliness
"and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righte-
"ously, and godly in this present world, in con-
"templation of the blessed hope and the glori-
"ous appearance of the great GOD, and our SA-
"VIOUR JESUS CHRIST; who gave himself for
"us, that he might redeem us from all iniqui-
"ty, and purify to himself a peculiar people zea-
"lous of good works."

6. and lastly, after all that hath or can be said, it must be acknowledged, and ought sadly to be lamented by us, that the wicked lives of christians are a marvellous scandal and reproach to our holy religion,

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gion, and a great obstacle to the spreading of it in the world, and a real objection against it to prejudiced persons, with whom it doth justly bring into doubt the goodness and efficacy of the institution it self, to see how little effect it hath upon the hearts and lives of men. It is hard for a man to maintain the reputation of an excellent master in any kind, when all the world sees, that most of his scholars prove dunces. Whatever commendation may be given to any art or science, men will question the truth and reality of it, when they see the greatest part of those who profess it, not able to do any thing answerable to it. The christian religion pretends to be an art of serving God more decently and devoutly, and of living better than other men; but if it be so, why do not the professors of this excellent religion shew the force and virtue of it in their lives? and though I have sufficiently shewn, that this is not enough to overthrow the truth and disparage the excellency of the christian doctrine; yet it will certainly go a great way with prejudiced persons, and it cannot be expected otherwise.

So that we have infinite reason to be ashamed, that there is so plain a contrariety between the laws of christianity, and the lives of the greatest part of christians; so notorious and palpable a difference between the religion that is in the bible, and that which is to be seen and read in the conversations of men.

Who that looks upon the manners of the present age, could believe, (if he did not know it) that the holy and pure doctrine of the christian religion had ever been so much as heard, much less pretended to be entertained and believed among us? nay among those who seem to make a more serious profession

of

of religion, when we consider how strangely they allow themselves in malice and envy, in passion and anger, and uncharitable censures, and evil speaking, in fierce contentions and animosities; who would believe that the great instrument of these mens religion, I mean the holy bible, by which they profess to regulate and govern their lives, were full of plain and strict precepts of love and kindness, of charity and peace, and did a hundred times with all imaginable severity, and under pain of forfeiting the kingdom of God, forbid malice and envy, and revenge, and evil speaking, and rash and uncharitable censures, and tell us so plainly that the christian religion obligeth men "to put off all these;" and that "if any man seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain?" do men read and hear these things every day, and profess to believe them to be the truths of God, and yet live as if they were verily persuaded they were false? what can we conclude from hence, but either that this is not christianity, or the greatest part of us are no christians?

So that if one of the apostles or primitive christians should rise from the dead, and converse among us, how would he wonder to see the face and complexion of christianity alter'd from what it was in their days; and were it not for the name and title which we bear, would sooner guess us to be any thing than christians?

So that upon the whole matter, there is no way to quit our selves of this objection, and to wash away the reproach of it, but to mend and reform our lives. 'Till this be done, it is unavoidable, but the vicious manners of men will affect our religion with

obloquy and reproach, and derive an ill conceit and opinion of it into the minds of men. And I cannot see how christianity can ever gain much ground in the world, 'till it be better adorned and recommended by the professors of it. Nay we have just cause to fear, that if GOD do not raise up some great and eminent instruments to awaken the world out of this stupid lethargy, that christianity will every day decline, and the world will in a short space be overrun with atheism and infidelity. For vice, and superstition, and enthusiasm, which are the reigning diseases of christendom, when they have run their course, and finish'd their circle, do all naturally end, and meet in atheism. And then it will be time for the great judge of the world to appear, and effectually to convince men of that, which they would not be persuaded to believe by any other means. And of this our SAVIOUR hath given us a terrible and fearful intimation in that question of his; "when the son of man comes, shall he find faith upon earth?" our SAVIOUR hath not positively affirmed it, and GOD grant that we may not make it, and find it true.

And thus I have, by GOD's assistance, given the best satisfaction I could, to the most material exceptions I have met with against our blessed SAVIOUR and his religion. The

II^d thing remains briefly to be spoken to, viz. how happy a thing it is to escape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion, "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." And this will appear if we consider these three or four things.

First, that prejudice does many times sway and

bias men against the plainest and clearest truths. We see in daily experience, what a false bias prejudice puts upon mens understandings. Men that are educated in the grossest errors and superstitions, how hard it is to convince them that they are in a wrong way! and with what difficulty are they persuaded of their mistake! nay they have hardly the patience to be told they are in an error, much less to consider what may be offer'd against it. How do the passions and lusts of men blind them and lead them aside from the truth, and incline them to that side of the question which is most favourable to their lusts and interests? how partially do men lean to that part which makes most for their advantage, though all the reason in the world lie on the other side?

Now ignorance and mistake are a great slavery of the understanding, if there were no worse consequences of our errors: and therefore our SAVIOUR says excellently, that the truth makes men free; "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Secondly, prejudice does not only bias men against the plainest truths, but in matters of greatest concernment, in things that concern the honour of God, and the good of others, and our own welfare and happiness. Prejudices against religion occasion mistakes of the highest nature, and may lead men to superstition and idolatry, and to all manner of impiety, nay many times to atheism and infidelity. The prejudices against the doctrine of our SAVIOUR are of another concernment than the prejudices which men have against the writers of natural philosophy or eloquence, or any other humane art or science. If a man's prejudice make him err in these matters

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matters, the thing is of no great moment: but the business of religion is a matter of the greatest and weightiest concernment to mankind.

Thirdly, the consequences of mens prejudices in these things prove many times fatal and destructive to them. Men may upon unreasonable prejudices “reject the counsel of God against themselves,” as it is said of the chief priests and pharisees among the Jews. Men may oppose the truth so obstinately and perversly, as to be “fighters against God,” and to bring certain ruin and “swift destruction upon themselves,” both in this world, and the other; as the Jews did, who by opposing the doctrine of the gospel, and persecuting our SAVIOUR and his disciples, “fill’d up the measure of their sins, ’till “wrath came upon them to the uttermost.” It is easy to entertain prejudices against religion, and by considering only the wrong side of things, to fortify our prejudices to such a degree, and entrench our selves so strongly in our errors, that the plainest and most convincing truths shall not be able to have any access to us, or make any impression upon us: but all this while we do in truth undermine our own happiness, and are secretly working our own ruin; and while we think we are opposing an enemy, we are destroying our selves; “for who hath harden’d himself against God” and his truth, “and prospered?” The principles of religion are a firm and immoveable rock, against which the more violently we dash our selves, the more miserably we shall be split and shatter’d. Our blessed SAVIOUR and his religion have been to many, and are to this day, “a stone of stumbling, “and a rock of offence;” but he himself hath told

us what shall be the fate of those who are offended at ^{S E R M.} him; "whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be ^{CXIX.} broken; but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." And therefore well might he say here in the text, "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

Fourthly, there are but few in comparison, who have the happiness to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion. Thus to be sure it was when christianity first appeared in the world: and though among us the great prejudice of education be removed; yet there are still many, who upon one account or other are prejudiced against religion, at least so far, as not to yield to the power of it in their lives. Few men are so impartial in considering things, as not to be swayed by the interest of their lusts and passions, as to keep the balance of their judgments even, and to suffer nothing but truth and reason to weigh with them. We generally pretend to be "pilgrims and strangers in the world," and to be all travelling towards heaven: but few of us have the indifferency of travellers; who are not concern'd to find out the fairest and the easiest way, but to know which is the right way, and to go in it. Thus it should be with us, our end should always be in our eye, and we should choose our way only with respect to that; not considering our inclination so much as our design; nor choosing those principles for the government of our lives, which are most agreeable to our present desires, but those which will most certainly bring us to happiness at the last; and that I am sure the principles of the christian religion, firmly believed and practised by us, will do.

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Let us then be persuaded by all that hath been said upon this argument, to a firm belief of the christian doctrine. I hope you are in some measure satisfied, that the objections against it are not such, as ought much to move a wise and considerate man. If we believe that God hath taken so much care of mankind, as to make any certain revelation of his will to them, and of the way to eternal happiness; let us next consider, whether any religion in the world can come in competition with the christian, and with half that reason pretend to be from God, that christianity is able to produce for it self, whether we consider the things to be believed or the duties to be practised, or the motives or arguments to the practice of those duties, or the divine confirmation that is given to the whole. And if we be thus persuaded concerning it, let us resolve to live up to the laws and rules of this holy religion. Our belief of it signifies nothing without the fruits and effects of a good life. And if this were once resolved upon, the difficulty of believing would cease; for the true reason why men are unwilling to believe the truths of the gospel, is because they are loth to put them in practice. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light." The true ground of mens prejudice against the christian doctrine, is because they have no mind to obey it; and when all is done, the great objection that lies at the bottom of mens minds against it, is, that it is an enemy to their lusts, and they cannot profess to believe it without condemning themselves, for not complying with it in their lives and practice.

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JESUS the SON of GOD, prov'd by
his resurrection.

R O M. i. 4.

And declared to be the SON of GOD, with power, according to the SPIRIT of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

ST. Paul in the beginning of this epistle (ac- SERM.
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cording to his custom in the rest) styles himself an apostle, particularly call'd, and set apart by GOD, for the preaching of the gospel; the main subject whereof was, "JESUS CHRIST our LORD;" who as he was, according to his divine nature, "the eternal SON of GOD;" so according to his humane nature, he was not only "the son of man," but also "the SON of GOD." "According to the flesh" (that is, the weakness, and frailty, and mortality of this humane nature) "he was the son of David," that is, of his posterity by his mother, who was of that house and line. "Made of the seed of David, according to the flesh," ver. 3. "But according to the SPIRIT of holiness;" (that is, in regard of that divine power of the HOLY GHOST, which was manifested in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead) "he was demonstrated to be the SON of GOD;" even according to his humane nature; "declared to be the SON of GOD, with power, according to the SPIRIT of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

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All the difficulty in the words is concerning the meaning of this phrase of CHRIST's being "declared" "to be the SON of GOD:" the word is *ἀποκατελέγετο*, which most frequently in scripture does signify, "predestinated, decreed, determined;" but likewise signifies, that which is "defined, declared, demonstrated, put out of all doubt and controversy." And in this sense our translation renders it, as if the apostle had said, that our LORD JESUS CHRIST, though according to the frailty and weakness of his humane nature, he was of the seed of David; yet in respect of that divine power of the HOLY GHOST, which manifested itself in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead, he was "declared to be the SON of GOD, with power," that is, mightily, powerfully demonstrated to be so; so as to put the matter out of dispute and controversy.

And therefore following our own translation, I shall handle the words in this sense, as containing this proposition in them: "that the resurrection of our LORD JESUS CHRIST from the dead, by the HOLY GHOST, is a powerful demonstration that he was the SON of GOD."

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this proposition to consider these two things.

First, upon what account CHRIST, as man, is said to be "the SON of GOD."

Secondly, in what sense he is said to be "declared to be the SON of GOD, by his resurrection from the dead." The consideration of these two particulars will fully clear this proposition, and the apostle's meaning in it.

First,

First, upon what account CHRIST, as a man, is said to be "the SON of GOD." And for our right apprehension of this matter, it is very well worthy our observation, that CHRIST, as man, is no where in scripture said to be "the SON of GOD," but with relation to the divine power of the HOLY GHOST, some way or other eminently manifested in him; I say the divine power of the HOLY GHOST, as the lord and giver of life, as he is called in the ancient creeds of the christian church. For as men are naturally said to be the children of those from whom they receive their life and being; so CHRIST, as man, is said to be "the SON of GOD," because he had life communicated to him, from the FATHER, by an immediate power of the SPIRIT of GOD, or the HOLY GHOST. First at his conception, which was by the HOLY GHOST. The conception of our blessed SAVIOUR was an immediate act of the power of the HOLY GHOST, overshadowing, as the scripture expresseth it, the blessed mother of our LORD: and then at his resurrection, when after his death, he was, by the operation of the HOLY GHOST, raised to life again.

Now upon these two accounts only, CHRIST as man is said in scripture to be "the SON of GOD." He was really so upon account of his conception; but this was secret and invisible: but most eminently and remarkably so, upon account of his resurrection, which was open and visible to all.

1. Upon account of his conception by the power of the HOLY GHOST. That upon this account he was called "the SON of GOD," St. Luke most expressly tells us, Luke i. 35. where the angel tells the virgin Mary, that "the HOLY GHOST should come upon her, and the

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“ power of the highest should overshadow her, and
“ therefore that holy thing, which should be born
“ of her, should be called the SON of GOD.” And
this our SAVIOUR means by “ the FATHER’s sancti-
“ fying him, and sending him into the world ;” for
which reason he says he might justly call himself the
SON of GOD, John x. 35, 36. “ If he call them
“ gods, unto whom the word of GOD came, and
“ the scripture cannot be broken : say ye of him,
“ whom the FATHER hath sanctified, and sent into
“ the world, thou blasphemest, because I said I am
“ the SON of GOD ?” if there had been no other
reason, this had been sufficient to have given him the
title of the SON of GOD, that he was brought into
the world by the sanctification, or divine power of
the HOLY GHOST.

2. CHRIST is also said in scripture to be the SON
of GOD, and to be declared to be so upon account of
“ his resurrection from the dead,” by the power
of the HOLY GHOST. His resurrection from the
dead, is here in the text ascribed to “ the SPIRIT
“ of holiness, or the HOLY GHOST.” And so in
other places of scripture, Rom. viii. 11. “ If
“ the SPIRIT of him that raised up JESUS from
“ the dead, dwell in you :” and, 1 Pet. iii. 18.
“ Being put to death in the flesh : but quickned in
“ the SPIRIT ;” that is, he suffered in that frail
mortal nature which he assumed ; but was raised again
by the power of the HOLY GHOST, of the SPIRIT
of GOD which resided in him. And upon this ac-
count he is expressly said in scripture to be the SON
of GOD. Psal. ii. 7. “ I will declare the decree
“ the LORD hath said unto me, thou art my SON
“ this day have I begotten thee ;” to which per-

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haps the apostle alludes here in the text, when he SERM.
says that "CHRIST was decreed to be the SON of CXX.

"GOD by his resurrection from the dead." To be
sure these words, "this day have I begotten thee,"
St. Paul expressly tells us were accomplish'd in the
resurrection of CHRIST; as if GOD by raising him
from the dead, had begotten him, and decreed him
to be his SON." Acts xii. 32, 33. "And we de-
clare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise
which was made unto the fathers, GOD hath ful-
filled the same unto their children, in that he hath
raised up JESUS again, as it is also written in the
second psalm, thou art my SON, this day have I
begotten thee."

He was the SON of GOD before, as he was conceived
by the HOLY GHOST; but this was secret and invi-
sible, and known only to the mother of our LORD:
and therefore GOD thought fit to give a publick and
visible demonstration of it, so as to put the matter
out of all question, he declared him in a powerful
manner to be his SON, by giving him a new life
after death, by raising him from the dead; and by
this new and eminent testimony given to him, de-
clared him again to be his SON, and confirmed the
title which was given him before upon a true, but
more secret account, of his being conceived by the
HOLY GHOST.

And as our SAVIOUR is said to be the SON of GOD
upon this twofold account, of his conception by
the HOLY GHOST, and his resurrection to life by
the SPIRIT of GOD: so the scripture (which does
solicitously pursue a resemblance and conformity be-
tween CHRIST and christians) does likewise upon
a twofold account. (answerable to our SAVIOUR's
birth

SERM. birth and resurrection) call true believers and christi-
 CXX. ftians, "the children of GOD;" viz. upon account
 of their regeneration or new birth, by the operation of the SPIRIT of GOD; and upon account of their resurrection to eternal life, by the power of the same SPIRIT.

Upon account of our regeneration and becoming christians by the power and operation of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD upon our minds, we are said to be the children of GOD, as being regenerated and born again by the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD. And this is our first adoption. And for this reason the SPIRIT of GOD conferred upon christians at their baptism, and dwelling and residing in them afterwards, is called "the SPIRIT of adoption;" Rom. viii. 15. "Ye have received the SPIRIT of adoption, whereby you cry abba FATHER;" and Gal. iv. 5, 6. believers are said to "receive the adoption of sons; GOD having sent forth the SPIRIT of his SON into their hearts, crying abba FATHER;" that is, all christians, for as much as they are regenerated by the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, and having the SPIRIT of GOD dwelling in them, may with confidence call GOD FATHER, and look upon themselves as his children. So the apostle tells us, Rom. viii. 14. "That as many as are led (or acted) by the SPIRIT of GOD, are the sons of GOD."

But though we are said to be the children of GOD upon account of our regeneration, and the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD dwelling and residing in christians; yet we are eminently so, upon account of our resurrection to eternal life, by the mighty power of GOD's SPIRIT. This is our final adoption and the consummation

mation of it; and therefore Rom. viii. 21. this is called "the glorious liberty of the sons of God," because by this we are for ever "delivered from the bondage of corruption;" and by way of eminency, "the adoption, viz. the redemption of our bodies."

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We are indeed "the sons of God" before, upon account of the regenerating and sanctifying virtue of the HOLY GHOST; but finally and chiefly upon account of our resurrection by the power of the divine SPIRIT. So St. John tells us, that then we shall be declared to be "the sons of God," after another manner than we are now: 1 John iii. 1. "Behold what manner of love the FATHER hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "Now we are the sons of God," (that is, our adoption is begun in our regeneration and sanctification) "but it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" we shall be much more eminently so at the resurrection. "We know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him."

But the most express and remarkable text to this purpose, is, Luke xx. 36. where good men, after the resurrection, are for this reason said to be "the children of God," because they are "the children of the resurrection." "But they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." For this reason they are said to be "the children of God," because they are raised by him to a new life; and to be made partakers of that

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that which is promised to them, and reserved for them. For that all are raised by the power of GOD, out of the dust of the earth, are not therefore "the children of GOD;" but only they that have part in the blessed resurrection to eternal life, and "do inherit the kingdom prepared for them." Not those who are raised to a perpetual death, and the "resurrection of condemnation." These are not "the children of GOD;" but "the children of wrath," and "the children of perdition."

But the resurrection of the just, is the full and final declaration, that we are "the children of GOD;" not only because we are restored to a new life, but because, at the resurrection, we are admitted to the full possession of that blessed inheritance which is purchased for us, and promised to us.

And the SPIRIT of GOD which is conferred upon believers in their regeneration, and afterwards dwells and resides in them, is the pledge and earnest of our final adoption, by our resurrection to eternal life; and upon this account, and no other, is said to be the earnest of our future inheritance, and the seal and confirmation of it. Eph. i. 13. "In whom" "also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed by the" "HOLY SPIRIT of promise, which is the earnest" "of our inheritance, until the redemption of the" "purchased possession;" that is, the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD which christians were made partakers of, upon their sincere belief of the christian religion, is the seal and earnest of our resurrection to eternal life; as the apostle plainly tells us, in that remarkable text; Rom. viii. 11. "If the SPIRIT of" "him that raised up JESUS from the dead dwell in" "you, he that raised up CHRIST from the dead

"shall

"shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his ^{SERM.}
"SPIRIT that dwelleth in you." ^{CXX.}

I have been the longer upon this, because it serves fully to explain to us those obscure phrases, of "the seal and earnest, and first-fruits of the SPIRIT," which many have mistaken to import some particular and spiritual revelation or impression upon the minds of good men, assuring them of their salvation. Whereas the apostle intended no more by them, but that the SPIRIT of GOD which dwells in believers, enabling them "to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and to bring forth the fruits of the SPIRIT," is a pledge and earnest to us, of a blessed resurrection to eternal life by the power of the SPIRIT of GOD which now dwells in us, and is the same SPIRIT which raised up JESUS from the dead. And in this chapter, the SPIRIT of GOD is said, ver. 16. "to bear witness to our spirits," that is, to assure our minds, "that we are the children of GOD;" that is, that we are his children now, and consequently heirs of a glorious resurrection to eternal life: for so it follows in the next words, "and if children, then heirs, heirs of GOD, and joint heirs with CHRIST; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together." And this being glorified together with CHRIST at the resurrection, he calls, ver. 19. "the manifestation of the sons of GOD." Thus you see how in conformity to the SON of GOD, our elder brother, we are said to be the sons of GOD, because we are now regenerated, and shall at the last day be raised up to eternal life, by the power of the SPIRIT of GOD. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded to speak to, for the clearing of these words, namely, in what sense CHRIST is said to be "declared, or demonstrated to be the SON of GOD by his resurrection from the dead." By which the apostle means these two things.

1. That by his resurrection from the dead he was approved by GOD to be the true MESSIAS, and vindicated to the world from all suspicion of being a deceiver and impostor. And consequently in the

2. Place, that hereby GOD gave testimony to the truth and divinity of his doctrine.

1. By his resurrection from the dead, he was approved by GOD to be the true MESSIAS, foretold by the prophets, and expected at that time by the Jews, and sufficiently vindicated to the world to be no deceiver and impostor.

And for our fuller understanding of this, we are to consider these two things.

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the MESSIAS. And

(2.) What the many crimes were which they laid to our SAVIOUR's charge, and for which they condemned him.

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the MESSIAS. And it is very plain from the evangelical history, that they generally apprehended these two things of him: that the MESSIAS was to be "the SON of GOD, and the king of Israel;" and therefore that our SAVIOUR by affirming himself to be the MESSIAS, did call himself "the SON of GOD, and the king of Israel."

John i. 41. Andrew tells his brother Simon, "we have found the MESSIAS." ver. 45. Philip tells Natha-

Nathanael, " we have found him, of whom Moses S E R M.
" in the law, and the prophets did write;" that is, CXX.
the MESSIAS. ver. 49. Nathanael upon discourse
with our SAVIOUR, being convinced that he was
the MESSIAS, owns him in these terms; " Rabbi,
" thou art the SON of GOD, thou art the king of
" Israel." John vi. 69. Peter declares his belief that
he was the CHRIST, or the MESSIAS, in these
words, " we believe and are sure that thou art the
" SON of the living GOD." This appears likewise
from the high-priest's question to him, Matth. xxvi.
63. " Art thou the CHRIST, (that is, the MESSIAS)
" the SON of the living GOD;" or as is it in St.
Mark, " the SON of the blessed;" compared with
Pilate's question, " art thou the king of the Jews?"
and when he was upon the cross, some reviled him
under the notion of the SON of GOD, Matth. xxvii.
40. " If thou be the SON of GOD, come down from
" the cross:" others under the notion of " the
" king of Israel," ver. 42. " If he be the king of
" Israel, let him come down from the cross." From
all which it is plain that the Jews expected and
believed, that the true MESSIAS was to be the SON
of GOD, and the king of Israel; and whoever was
not so, was a deceiver and impostor. But our SA-
VIOUR affirmed himself to be the true MESSIAS, and
the SON of GOD. Now GOD by raising him from
the dead, did abundantly vindicate him to the
world, from all suspicion of imposture; and gave
testimony to him, that he was all that he said of
himself, viz. " the true MESSIAS, and the SON of
" GOD."

Which will further appear, if we consider, (2dly,)
what were the crimes which the Jews laid to our

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SAVIOUR's charge, and for which they condemned him; and they were mainly these two, that by giving himself to be the MESSIAS, he made himself "king of Israel, and the SON of GOD." Of the first of these they accused him to Pilate, hoping by this accusation to make him guilty of sedition against the Roman government; for saying, that he was "the king of Israel." Of the other they accused him to the chief priests, as being guilty of blasphemy, in that not being the MESSIAS, he call'd himself "the SON of GOD." And upon this they laid the main stress, as being a thing that would condemn him by their law. They charged him with this in his life-time, as appears by those words of our SAVIOUR, John x. 36. "Say ye of him whom the FATHER hath sanctified, and sent into the world, thou blasphemest; because I said, 'I am the SON of GOD?'" And when he was arraigned before the chief priests, they accused him of this, and he owning this charge, "that he call'd himself the SON of GOD," upon this they judged him guilty of death. Matth. xxvi. 65, 66. "Then the high priest rent his clothes, and said, he hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witness? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? they answered, he is guilty of death." And when Pilate told them, that he found no fault in him, they still instance in this as his crime, John xix. 7. "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself 'the SON of GOD.'"

Now this being the crime which was charged upon him, and for which he was crucified, and put to death; GOD, by raising him from the dead, and

taking

aking him up into heaven, gave testimony to him, SERM
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that he was no impostor, and that he did not vainly
arrogate to himself to be the MESSIAS, and the SON
of GOD. GOD by raising him from the dead, by
the power of the HOLY GHOST, gave a mighty
demonstration to him, that he was the SON of GOD.
For which reason he is said by the apostle, 1 Tim.
iii. 16. to be "justified by the SPIRIT." The
SPIRIT gave testimony to him at his baptism, and
by the mighty works that appeared in him in his
life-time; but he was most eminently and remarkably
"justified by the HOLY GHOST, by his resurrection
"from the dead;" GOD hereby bearing him wit-
ness, that he was unjustly condemned, and that he
assumed nothing to himself, but what of right did
belong to him, when he said he was the MESSIAS,
and the SON of GOD. For how could a man that
was condemned to die for calling himself the SON of
GOD, be more remarkably vindicated, and more
clearly proved to be so, than by being raised from
the dead, by the power of GOD?

And, 2dly, GOD did consequently hereby give
testimony to the truth and divinity of our SAVIOUR'S
doctrine. Being proved by his resurrection to be
the SON of GOD, this proved him to be a teacher
sent by him, and what he declared to the world was
the mind and will of GOD. For this none was
more likely to know, and to report truly to man-
kind, than the SON of GOD, who came from "the
"bosom of his FATHER." And because the resur-
rection of CHRIST is so great a testimony to the
truth of his doctrine, hence it is that St. Paul tells
us, that the belief of this one article of CHRIST'S
resurrection, is sufficient to a man's salvation,
Rom.

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ROM. x. 9. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth
 "the LORD JESUS, and shalt believe in thy heart,
 "that GOD hath raised him from the dead, thou
 "shalt be saved." The reason is plain, because the
 resurrection of CHRIST confirmed the truth and di-
 vinity of his doctrine; so that the belief of our
 SAVIOUR's resurrection does by necessary consequence
 infer the belief of his whole doctrine. That GOD
 raised him from the dead, after he was condemned
 and put to death for calling himself the SON of
 GOD, is a demonstration that he really was the SON
 of GOD; and if he was the SON of GOD, the do-
 ctrine which he taught was true, and from GOD.

And thus I have shewn you, how the resurrection
 of CHRIST from the dead, is a powerful demon-
 stration that he was the SON of GOD.

All that remains, is briefly to draw some practical
 inferences from the consideration of our SAVIOUR's
 resurrection.

1st. To confirm and establish our minds in the be-
 lief of the christian religion, of which the resurrection
 of CHRIST from the dead is so great a confirma-
 tion. And therefore I told you that this one article
 is mention'd by St. Paul as the sum and abridgment
 of the christian faith; "if thou shalt confess
 "with thy mouth the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and
 "believe in thy heart that GOD hath raised him
 "from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The belief
 of our SAVIOUR's resurrection doth by necessary
 consequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine
 for he who believes that GOD raised him from the
 dead, after he was put to death for calling him-
 self the SON of GOD, cannot but believe him to be

the SON of GOD ; and consequently that the doctrine^{S E R M.}
which he delivered was from GOD. ^{CXX.}

2dly, The resurrection of CHRIST from the dead assures us of a future judgment, and of the recompences and rewards of another world. That CHRIST was raised from the dead, is a demonstration of another life after this ; and no man that believes the immortality of our souls, and another life after this, ever doubted of a future judgment ; so that by the resurrection of CHRIST from the dead, GOD hath given assurance unto all men of a future judgment, and consequently of the recompences and rewards of another world.

The consideration whereof ought to have a mighty influence upon us, more especially to these three purposes.

1st. To raise our minds above the present enjoyments of this life. Were but men convinced of this great and obvious truth, that there is an infinite difference between time and eternity, between a few days and everlasting ages ; would we but sometimes represent to ourselves, what thoughts and apprehensions dying men have of this world, how vain and empty a thing it appears to them ; how like a pageant and shadow it looks, as it passeth away from them ; methinks none of these things could be a sufficient temptation to any man to forget GOD and his soul ; but notwithstanding all the present delights and allurements of sense, we should be strongly intent upon the concernments of another world, and almost wholly taken up with the thoughts of the vast eternity which we are ready to enter into. For what is there in this world, this vast and howling wilderness, this rude and barbarous country which

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we are but to pass through, which should detain and entangle our affections, and take off our thoughts from our everlasting habitation, from that better, and that heavenly country where we hope to live and to be happy for ever?

2dly, The consideration of the rewards of another world should comfort and support us under the troubles and afflictions of this world. The hopes of a blessed resurrection are a very proper consideration to bear us up under the evils and pressures of this life. If we hope for so great a happiness hereafter, we may be contented to bear some afflictions in this world; because the blessedness which we expect will so abundantly recompense and outweigh our present sufferings. So that the apostle assures us, Rom. viii. 18. "We know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." The consideration whereof was that which made the primitive christians to triumph in their sufferings, and in the midst of all their tribulations "to rejoice in the hopes of the glory of God;" because their sufferings did really prepare and make way for their glory. So the same apostle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17. 18. "Our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilst we look not at the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

3dly, and lastly, the assurance of our future reward is a mighty encouragement to obedience and holy life. What greater encouragement can we have than this, that all the good which we do in this world

world will accompany us into the other? "that when we rest from our labours, our works will follow us?" that when we shall be stript of other things, and parted from them, these will still remain with us, and bear us company? our riches and honours, our sensual pleasures and enjoyments will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay many times they do not accompany us so far as the grave, but take occasion to forsake us, when we have the greatest need and use of them: but piety and virtue are "that better part which cannot be taken from us." All the good actions which we do in this world will go along with us into the other, and through the merits of our REDEEMER procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a glorious and eternal reward; not according to the meanness of our services, but according to the bounty of his mind, and the vastness of his treasures and estate.

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Now what an encouragement is this to holiness and obedience, to consider that it will all be our own another day; to be assured that whoever serves God faithfully, and does suffer for him patiently, does lay up so much treasure for himself in another world, and provides lasting comforts for himself, and faithful and constant companions, that will never leave him nor forsake him?

Let us then do all the good we can, while we have opportunity, and serve God with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do shall be lost and fall to the ground, that every grace and virtue that we exercise in this life, and every degree of them, "shall receive their full recompence at the resurrection of the just."

How should this inspire us with resolution and zeal and industry in the service of GOD, to have such a reward continually in our eye? how should it tempt us to our duty, to have a crown and a kingdom offered to us, “ joys unspeakable and full of “ glory, such things as eye hath not seen, nor ear “ heard, nor have entred into the heart of man?” And such are the things which GOD hath laid up for them who love him heartily, and serve him faithfully in this world.

S E R M O N CXXI.

The danger of apostasy from christianity.

H E B. vi. 4, 5, 6.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, and have tasted the good word of GOD, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the SON of GOD afresh, and put him to an open shame.

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THESE words are full of difficulties, and the misunderstanding of them hath not only been an occasion of a great deal of trouble, and even despair to particular persons, but one of the chief reasons why the church of Rome did for a long time reject the authority of this book; which by the

way

way I cannot but take notice of as a demonstrative S E R M. CXXI.
instance both of the fallible judgment of that church;
and of the fallibility of oral tradition; for St. Jerom
more than once expressly tells us, " that in his time
(which was about 400 years after CHRIST) the
church of Rome did not receive this epistle for ca-
nonical:" but it is plain, that since that time,
whether moved by the evidence of the thing, or
(which is more probable) by the consent and autho-
rity of other churches, they have received it, and do
at this day acknowledge it for canonical; from whence
one of these two things will necessarily follow; ei-
ther that they were in an error for 400 years together
while they rejected it; or that they have since erred
for a long time in receiving it. One of these is
unavoidable; for if the book be canonical now, it
was so from the beginning; for Bellarmine himself
confesseth (and if he had not confessed it, it is never-
theless true and certain) that the church cannot make
a book canonical, which was not so before; if it
was not canonical at first, it cannot be made so after-
ward; so that let them choose which part they will,
it is evident, beyond all denial, that the church of
Rome hath actually erred in her judgment concern-
ing the authority of this book; and one error of
this kind is enough to destroy her infallibility,
there being no greater evidence that a church is not
infallible, than if it plainly appear that she hath been
deceived.

And this also is a convincing instance of the falli-
bility of oral tradition. For if that be infallible in
delivering down to us the canonical books of scrip-
ture, it necessarily follows, that whatever books were
delivered down to us for canonical in one age, must

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have been so in all ages ; and whatever was rejected in any age, must always have been rejected : but we plainly see the contrary, from the instance of this epistle, concerning which the church of Rome (which pretends to be the great and faithful preserver of tradition) hath in several ages deliver'd several things. This is a peremptory instance both of the fallibility of the Roman church, and of her oral tradition.

Having observed this by the way, which I could not well pass by upon so fair an occasion, I shall betake myself to the explication of these words ; towards which it will be no small advantage to consider the particular phrases and expressions in the text. “ It is impossible for those who were once “ enlightned ;” that is, were solemnly admitted into the church by baptism, and embraced the profession of christianity. Nothing was more frequent among the ancients, than to call baptism “ φωτισμόν, illumination ;” and those who were baptized were called “ φωτιζόμενοι, enlightned persons,” because of that divine illumination which was conveyed to the minds of men by the knowledge of christianity, the doctrine whereof they made profession of at their baptism. And therefore Justin Martyr tells us, “ that by calling upon GOD the FATHER, and the name of “ our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and the name of the “ HOLY GHOST, ὁ φωτιζόμενος λέγεται, the enlightned person is washed ;” and again more expressly “ Καλεῖται ὁ τῆτο λουτρὸν φωτισμός, this laver (speaking of baptism) is called illumination.” And St Cyprian gives us the reason ; because by virtue of baptism *in expiatum pectus ac purum desuper se lumen infundit*, “ light is infused from above into the pur

“fied soul.” And that this expression is so to be understood here in the text, as also chap. x. 32. the Syriac and Ethiopic give us good ground to believe; for they render the text thus, “it is impossible for those who have been once baptized, and have tasted of the heavenly gift.” And at the xth chap. ver. 32. which we translate, but call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;” that is, call to mind the former days, in which after by baptism ye had publickly embraced the profession of christianity, ye were upon that account exposed to many grievous sufferings and persecutions. So that I think there can be no great doubt, but, by “those that were once enlightned,” the apostle means those that were baptized.

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To proceed then, “for it is impossible for those who were once enlightned, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST;” these two expressions seem to denote the spiritual benefits and graces of the HOLY GHOST conferred upon christians by baptism; particularly regeneration, which is the proper work of the HOLY GHOST, and justification and remission of sins. So we find faith, whereby we are justified, called the gift of God, Eph. ii. 8. “Faith is the gift of God;” and our justification is called a gift, and a free gift, five several times in one chapter, Rom. v. 15, 16, 17, 18. “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift; for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man JESUS CHRIST, hath abounded unto many;” and what this free gift is, he tells us in the next words, viz.

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viz. justification, or remission of sins, ver. 16.
 “ And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the
 “ gift; for the judgment was by one to condemna-
 “ tion; but the free gift is of many offences unto
 “ justification. For if by one man’s offence, death
 “ reigned by one, much more they which receive
 “ abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteouf-
 “ nefs, shall reign in life by one JESUS CHRIST.
 “ Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment
 “ came upon all men to condemnation: even so by
 “ the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon
 “ all men unto justification of life.” So that by
 “ the heavenly gift,” I understand remission of
 sins, and by being “ made partakers of the HOLY
 “ GHOST” the sanctifying power and efficacy of
 GOD’S SPIRIT.

“ And have tasted the good word of GOD;”
 that is, entertained the gospel, which is here called
 “ the good word of GOD;” by reason of the gra-
 cious promises contained in it, particularly the pro-
 mises of eternal life and happiness.

“ And the powers of the world to come,”
 δυνάμεις τε μέλλουσιν αἰῶν, the powers of the
 gospel age; that is, the miraculous powers of the
 HOLY GHOST which were bestowed upon men, in
 order to the propagation of the gospel. And that
 this is the true meaning of this phrase, will I think
 be very plain to any one who shall but consider,
 that the word δυνάμεις is generally in scripture
 used for miraculous powers and operations; and
 particularly to express the miraculous gifts of the
 HOLY GHOST, which were bestowed upon the
 apostles and first christians; (I need not cite the par-
 ticular texts for the proof of this, they are so many
 and

and so well known;) and then if we consider farther, SERM.
CXXI. that the times of the gospel, the days of the MESSIAS, are frequently called by the Jews *seculum futurum*, “the age to come.” And indeed this is the very phrase used by the LXXII concerning our SAVIOUR, Isa. ix. 6. where he is called according to our translation, “the everlasting FATHER,” but according to that of the LXXII πατήρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, “the FATHER of the future age.” And this very phrase is used once more in this epistle to the Heb. chap. ii. 5. “For unto the angels hath he “not put in subjection the world to come, whereof “we now speak.” He had said before, “that the “law was given by angels,” ver. 2. “If the word “spoken by angels was stedfast;” but the dispensation of the gospel, which he calls “the world to “come,” or the future age, was not committed to them, this was administered by the SON of GOD; “unto the angels hath he not put into subjection “the world to come.” And ’tis observable, that this phrase is only used in this epistle to the Hebrews, because the Jews very well understood the meaning of it, being that whereby they commonly express the times of the gospel according to that ancient tradition of the house of Elias, which distributed the duration of the world into three αἰῶνες, or ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the MESSIAS, which they called the *seculum futurum*, or “the age to come;” and which is likewise in scripture called, “the last “days, or times, and the conclusion of the ages.” Concerning which, it was particularly prophesied, that the HOLY GHOST should be poured forth upon men in miraculous gifts and powers. And to this
very

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very purpose the prophet Joel is cited by St. Peter, Acts ii. 16, 17. "That is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, and it shall come to pass in the last days (saith God) I will pour out of my SPIRIT upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, &c." From all which it is very evident, that by "tasting of the powers of the world to come," is meant being partakers of the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, which were poured forth in the gospel age, by the Jews commonly called "the world to come."

"If they shall fall away;" that is, if after all this they shall apostatize from this profession, out of love to this present world, or from the fear of persecutions and sufferings.

"It is impossible to renew them again to repentance;" that is, it is a thing very difficult, hardly to be hoped for, that such wilful and notorious apostates should be restored again by repentance. For the word ἀδύνατον, which we translate "impossible," is not always to be taken in the strictest sense, for that which absolutely cannot be; but many times for that which is so very difficult that it seems next to an impossibility. So our SAVIOUR, that which in one place he calls "exceeding hard, viz. for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven", he afterwards calls "impossible with men;" and so here I understand the apostle, that those who apostatize from christianity, after baptism and the benefits of it, 'tis exceeding hard to recover them again to repentance: this phrase "πάλιν ἀνακαινίσεν εἰς μετάνοιαν, to renew them again to repentance," some understand of restoring them again to the peace and communion of the church,

by

by a course of penance, such as was prescribed in the ancient church to great offenders; and then they understand by ἀδύνατον, not a natural, but a moral impossibility; that which cannot be done according to the orders and constitutions of the church; that is, the church did refuse to admit apostates, and some other great offenders, as murderers and adulterers, to a course of penance, in order to their reconciliation with the church; this Tertullian tells us was the strictness of the church in his time, *neque idololatriæ, neque sanguini pax ab ecclesia redditur*; “they admitted neither idolaters, nor murderers to the reconciliation of the church.” Though they were never so penitent, and shed never so many tears, yet he says they were *jejunæ pacis lachrymæ*, their tears were in vain, to reconcile them to the peace and communion of the church. He says indeed they did not absolutely pronounce their case desperate in respect of God’s pardon and forgiveness; *sed de veniâ Deo reservamus*, “for that they referr’d them to God:” but they were never to be admitted again into the church; so strict were many churches, and that upon the authority of this text; though the church of Rome was more moderate in this matter, and for that reason call’d the authority of this book into question.

But I see no reason why these words should primarily be understood of restoring men to the communion of the church by penance: but they seem to be meant of restoring men to the favour of God by repentance; of which indeed their being restor’d to the communion of the church was a good sign. This the apostle says was very difficult, for those who after baptism, and the several benefits of it,

SERMON. did apostatize from christianity, "to be recover'd
CXXI. "again to repentance."

"Seeing they crucify to themselves the SON of
"GOD afresh, and put him to an open shame."
This is spoken by way of aggravation of the crime
of apostasy, that they who fall off from christianity,
in effect and by interpretation do crucify "the SON of
"GOD" over again, and expose him to shame and re-
proach, as the Jews did; for by denying and re-
nouncing of him, they declare him to be an im-
postor, and consequently worthy of that death
which he suffered, and that ignominy which he was
exposed to; and therefore, in account of GOD, they
are said to do that, which by their actions they do
approve; so that it is made a crime of the highest
nature, as if they should "crucify the SON of GOD,"
and use him in the most ignominious manner, even
"tread under foot the SON of GOD," as the ex-
pression is to the same purpose, chap. x. 29.

Thus I have endeavour'd, as briefly and clearly as
I could, to explain to you the true meaning and im-
portance of the several phrases and expressions in
the text; the sense whereof amounts to this, that if
those who are baptized, and by baptism have re-
ceived remission of sins, and do believe the doctrine
of the gospel, and the promises of it, and are en-
dow'd with the miraculous gifts of the HOLY
GHOST, if such persons as these shall after all this
apostatize from christianity, it is very hard, and next
to an impossibility, to imagine how such persons
should recover again by repentance, seeing they are
guilty of as great a crime, as if in their own per-
sons they had put to death and ignominiously
used the SON of GOD, because by rejecting of him

they

they declared to the world that he suffered deservedly.

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Having thus explained the words, in order to the further vindication of them from the mistakes and misapprehensions which have been about them, I shall endeavour to make out these five things.

1st, That the sin here mention'd is not "the sin against the HOLY GHOST."

2dly, That the apostle does not declare it to be absolutely impossible, but only that those who are guilty of it are recover'd to repentance with great difficulty.

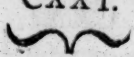
3dly, That it is not a partial apostasy from the christian religion by any particular vicious practice.

4thly, That it is a total apostasy from the christian religion, and more especially to the heathen idolatry, which the apostle here speaks of.

5thly, The reason of the difficulty of the recovery of those who fall into this sin.

1st, That the sin here mention'd is not "the sin against the HOLY GHOST," which I have heretofore discoursed of, and shewn wherein the particular nature of it does consist. There are three things which do remarkably distinguish the sin here spoken of in the text, from "the sin against the HOLY GHOST" described by our SAVIOUR.

1st, The persons that are guilty of this sin here in the text, are evidently such as had embraced christianity, and had taken upon them the profession of it: whereas those whom our SAVIOUR chargeth with "the sin against the HOLY GHOST," are such as constantly opposed his doctrine, and resisted the evidence he offer'd for it.



2dly, The particular nature of “the sin against the HOLY GHOST” consisted in blaspheming the SPIRIT, whereby our SAVIOUR wrought his miracles, and saying he did not those things by the SPIRIT of GOD, but by the assistance of the devil, in that malicious and unreasonable imputing of the plain effects of the HOLY GHOST to the power of the devil, and consequently in an obstinate refusal to be convinced by the miracles that he wrought: but here is nothing of all this so much as intimated by the apostle in this place.

3ly, “The sin against the HOLY GHOST” is declared to be absolutely “unpardonable, both in this world, and in that which is to come.” But this is not declared to be absolutely unpardonable; which brings me to the

2d thing, namely, that this sin here spoken of by the apostle, is not said to be absolutely unpardonable. It is not “the sin against the HOLY GHOST;” and whatever else it be, it is not out of the compass of GOD’s pardon and forgiveness. So our SAVIOUR hath told us, “that all manner of sin whatsoever that men have committed is capable of pardon, excepting only the sin against the HOLY GHOST.” And though the apostle here uses a very severe expression, that “if such persons fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance;” yet I have shewn that there is no necessity of understanding this phrase in the strictest sense of the word “impossible;” but as it is elsewhere used, for that “which is extremely difficult.” Nor indeed will our SAVIOUR’s declaration, which I mentioned before, that all sins whatsoever are pardonable, except “the sin against the HOLY GHOST,”

suffer

suffer us to understand these words in the most rigorous sense. SERM.
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3dly, The sin here spoken of, is not a partial apostasy from the christian religion by any particular vicious practice. Whosoever lives in the habitual practice of any sin plainly forbidden by the christian law, may be said so far to have apostatized from christianity; but this is not the falling away which the apostle here speaks of. This may be bad enough, and the greater sins any man who professeth himself a christian lives in, the more notoriously he contradicts his profession, and falls off from christianity, and the nearer he approaches to the sin in the text, and the danger there threatned: but yet for all that, this is not that which the apostle speaks of.

4thly, But it is a total apostasy from the christian religion, more especially to the heathen idolatry, the renouncing of the true GOD, and our SAVIOUR, and the worship of false gods which the apostle here speaks of. And this will be evident, if we consider the occasion and main scope of this epistle. And that was to confirm the Jews, who had newly embraced christianity, in the profession of that religion; and to keep them from apostatizing from it, because of the persecutions and sufferings which attended that profession. It pleased GOD, when christianity first appeared in the world, to permit the powers of the world to raise a vehement persecution against the professors of it, by reason whereof many out of base fear did apostatize from it, and in testimony of their renouncing it, were forced to sacrifice to the heathen idols. This is that which the apostle endeavours to caution and warn men against throughout this epistle. Chap. ii. 1. "therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed

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“heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should fall away:” and chap. iii, 12. it is called “an evil heart of unbelief to apostatize from the living God.” “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living GOD;” that is, to fall from the worship of the true GOD to idolatry. And chap. x. 23. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together:” that is, not declining the assemblies of christians for fear of persecution; and ver. 26. it is called “a sinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth;” and ver. 39. “a drawing back to perdition.” And chap. xii. it is call’d by way of eminency, “the sin which so easily besets;” the sin which in those times of persecution, they were so liable to.

And I doubt not but this is the sin which St. John speaks of, and calls, “the sin unto death,” and does not require christians “to pray for those who fall into it,” with any assurance that it shall be forgiven; 1 John v. 16. “There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death.” “We know that whosoever is born of GOD, sinneth not;” that is, does not fall into the sin of apostasy from christianity to that of the heathen idolatry: “but he that is begotten of GOD keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not;” and then ver. 21. he adds this caution, “little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Which sufficiently shews what that sin was which he was speaking of before.

So that this being the sin which the apostle design’d to caution men against throughout this epistle, it is

very

very evident what "falling away" it is he here speaks of, namely, a total apostasy from christianity, and more especially to the heathen idolatry.

5thly, We will consider the reason of the difficulty of recovering such persons by repentance. "If they fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance;" and that for these three reasons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin.
2. Because it renounceth, and casteth off the means of recovery.
3. Because it is so high a provocation of God to withdraw his grace from such persons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin, both in the nature and circumstances of it. It is downright apostasy from God, a direct renouncing of him, and rejecting of his truth, after men have owned it, and been inwardly persuaded and convinced of it, and so the apostle expreſſeth it in this epistle, calling it "an apostasy from the living God, a sinning wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth." It hath all the aggravations that a crime is capable of, being against the clearest light and knowledge, and the fullest conviction of a man's mind, concerning the truth and goodness of that religion which he renounceth; against the greatest obligations laid upon him by the grace and mercy of the gospel; after the free pardon of sins, and the grace and assistance of God's SPIRIT received, and a miraculous power conferr'd for a witness and testimony to themselves, of the undoubted truth of that religion which they have embraced. It is the highest affront to the SON of God, who revealed this religion to the world, and
sealed

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sealed it with his blood; and, in effect, an expression of as high malice to the author of this religion, as the Jews were guilty of when they put him to so cruel and shameful a death.

Now a sin of this heinous nature is apt naturally either to plunge men into hardness and impenitency, or to drive them to despair; and either of these conditions are effectual bars to their recovery. And both these dangers the apostle warns men of in this epistle, Chap. iii. 12, 13. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to apostatize from the living God: but exhort one another daily, whilst it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Or else the reflexion upon so horrid a crime is apt to drive a man to despair; as it did Judas, who after he had betray'd the Son of God, could find no ease but by making away himself; the guilt of so great a sin filled him with such terrors, that he was glad to fly to death for refuge, and to lay violent hands upon himself. And this likewise was the case of Spira, whose apostasy though it was not total from the christian religion, but only from the purity and reformation of it, brought him to that desperation of mind which was a kind of hell upon earth. And of this danger likewise the apostle admonisheth, chap. xii. 15. "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God (or as it is in our margin, lest any man fall from the grace of God) lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you;" and then he compares the case of such persons to Esau, who, when he had renounced his birthright, to which the blessing was annexed, was afterwards, when he would

have

have inherited the blessing, rejected, and “found
“ no place of repentance, though he sought it care-
“ fully with tears.”

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2dly, Those who are guilty of this sin, do renounce
and cast off the means of their recovery; and there-
fore it becomes extremely difficult “to renew them
“ again to repentance.” They reject the gospel,
which affords the best arguments and means to re-
pentance, and renounce the only way of pardon and
forgiveness. And certainly that man is in a very
sad and desperate condition, the very nature of whose
disease is to reject the remedy that should cure him.
And this the apostle tells us, was the condition of
those who apostatized from the gospel, chap. x. 26,
27. “For if we sin wilfully after we have received
“ the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no
“ more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking
“ for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which
“ shall devour the adversary.” The great sacrifice
and propitiation for sin was “the SON of GOD;”
and they who renounce him, what way of expia-
tion can they hope for afterward? what can they
expect but to fall into his hands as a judge, whom they
have rejected as a sacrifice and a SAVIOUR? And then,
3dly, Those who are guilty of this sin, provoke
God in the highest manner to withdraw his grace
and HOLY SPIRIT from them, by the power and
efficacy whereof they should by brought to repen-
tance; so that it can hardly otherwise be expected,
but that GOD should leave those to themselves, who
have so unworthily forsaken him; and wholly with-
draw his grace and SPIRIT from such persons as
have so notoriously “offered despite to the SPIRIT
“ of grace.”

I do not say that God always does this, he is sometimes better to such persons than they have deserved from him, and saves those who have done what they can to undo themselves, and mercifully puts forth his hand to recover them who were “drawing back to perdition;” especially if they were suddenly surprized by the violence of temptation, and yielded to it not deliberately and out of choice, but merely through weakness and infirmity, and so soon as they reflected upon themselves, did return and repent: this was the case of St. Peter, who being surprized with a sudden fear denied CHRIST; but being admonish’d of his sin by the signal which our SAVIOUR had given him, he was recovered by a speedy and hearty repentance. And so likewise several of the primitive christians, who were at first overcome by fear to renounce their religion, did afterwards recover themselves, and dy’d resolute martyrs: but it is a very dangerous state, out of which but few recover, and with great difficulty.

And thus I have done with the five things I propounded to make out, for the clearing of this text from the mistakes and misapprehensions which have been about it. I shall now draw some useful inferences from hence by way of application, that we may see how far this doth concern ourselves; and they shall be these.

1st, From the supposition here in the text, that such persons as are there described (namely, those who have been baptized, and by baptism have received remission of sins, and did firmly believe the gospel, and the promises of it, and were endowed with miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST) that these may fall away; this should caution us all against confidence

confidence and security ; when those that have gone thus far may fall, “ let him that standeth take
“ heed.”

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Some are of opinion, that those whom the apostle here describes are true and sincere christians, and that when he says, “ it is impossible if they fall away, to “ renew them again to repentance,” he means that they cannot fall away totally, so as to stand in need of being renewed again to repentance : but this is directly contrary to the apostle’s design, which was to caution christians against apostasy, because if they did fall away, their recovery would be so exceeding difficult ; which argument does plainly suppose that they might fall away.

On the other hand, there are others who think the persons, here described by the apostle, to be hypocritical christians, who for some base ends had entertained christianity, and put on the profession of it, but not being sincere and in good earnest, would forsake it when persecution came. But besides that this is contrary to the description which the apostle makes of these persons, who are said “ to have tasted “ of the heavenly gift, and to have been made partakers of the HOLY GHOST ;” by which if we understand justification and remission of sins, and the sanctifying virtue of the HOLY GHOST, which in all probability is the meaning of these phrases, these are blessings which did not belong to hypocrites, and which GOD does not bestow upon them ; I say, besides this, there is no reason to imagine that the apostle intended such persons, when it is likely that there were very few hypocrites in those times of persecution ; for what should tempt men to dissemble christianity, when it was so dangerous a profession ?

or what worldly ends could men have in taking that profession upon them, which was so directly contrary to their worldly interests?

So that upon the whole matter, I doubt not but the apostle here means those who are real in the profession of christianity, and that such “ might fall away.” For we may easily imagine, that men might be convinced of the truth and goodness of the christian doctrine, and in good earnest embrace the profession of it, and yet not be so perfectly weaned from the world, and so firmly rooted and established in that persuasion, as when it came to the trial, to be able to quite all for it, and to bear up against all the terrors and assaults of persecution; so that they might be real christians, and no hypocrites, though they were not so perfectly established and confirmed, and so sincerely resolved as many others. They were not like St. Paul, and those tried persons whom he speaks of, Rom. viii. 35, 37. “ Who shall separate us from the love of CHRIST? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors.” (They had been tried by all these, and yet had held out) upon which he breaks out into those triumphant expressions; “ I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of GOD, which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD.” They might not (I say) be like those: and yet for all that be real in their profession of christianity, and no hypocrites.

In short, I take them to be such as our SAVI-
OUR describes him to be "who received the seed
"into stony places," namely, "he that heareth
"the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet
"hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a
"while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth
"because of the word, by and by he is offended."
This is no description of a hypocrite; but of one
that was real, as far as he went (for he is said "to
"receive the word with joy") but was not well
rooted, and come to such a confirmed state, as re-
solutely to withstand the assaults of persecution.

So that tho' we have truly embraced christianity,
and are in a good degree sincere in the profession
of it, yet there is great reason why we should nei-
ther be "secure nor confident in our selves."
"Not secure," because there is great danger that
our resolutions may be born down one time or other
by the assaults of temptation, if we be not continu-
ally vigilant, and upon our guard. "Not confi-
dent in our selves," because "we stand by faith,
"and faith is the gift of GOD;" therefore as
the apostle infers, "we should not be high-minded,
"but fear." Men may have gone a great way in
christianity, and have been sincere in their profession
of it; and yet afterwards may apostatize in the
foulest manner, not only fall off to a vicious life,
but even desert the profession of their religion. I
would to GOD the experience of the world did not
give us too much reason to believe the possibility of
this. When we see so many revolt from the pro-
fession of the reformed religion, to the corruptions
and superstitions of Rome; and others from a reli-
gious and sober life, to plunge themselves into all
kind

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kind of lewdness and debauchery, and it is to be feared, into atheism and infidelity; can we doubt any longer whether it be possible for christians to fall away? I wish we were as certain of the possibility of their recovery, as we are of their falling, and that we had as many examples of the one as of the other.

Let us then be very vigilant over ourselves, and according to the apostle's exhortation, 2 Pet. iii. 17. "Seeing we know these things before, beware, lest we also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own steadfastness."

2dly, This shews us how great an aggravation it is, for men to sin against the means of knowledge which the gospel affords, and the mercies which it offers unto them. That which aggravated the sin of these persons was, that after they "were once enlightned," that is, at their baptism were instructed in the christian doctrine, the clearest and most perfect revelation that ever was made of God's will to mankind, that after they were "justified freely by God's grace," and had received remission of sins, and had many other benefits conferred upon them; that after all this, they should fall off from this "holy religion." This was that which did so heighten and inflame their guilt, and made their case so near desperate. The two great aggravations of crimes are wilfulness and ingratitude; if a crime be wilfully committed, and committed against one that hath obliged us by the greatest favours and benefits. Now he commits a fault wilfully, who does it against the clear knowledge of his duty. Ignorance excuset; for so far as a man is ignorant of the evil he does, so far the action

action is involuntary: but knowledge makes it to be a wilful fault. And this is a more peculiar aggravation of the sins of christians, because GOD hath afforded to them the greatest means and opportunities of knowledge; that revelation which GOD hath made of his will to the world by our blessed SAVIOUR, is the clearest light that ever mankind had, and the mercies which the gospel brings are the greatest that ever were offer'd to the sons of men; the free pardon and remission of all our sins, and the assistance of GOD's grace and HOLY SPIRIT, to help the weakness of our nature, and enable us to do what GOD requires of us. So that we who sin after baptism, after the knowledge of christianity, and those great blessings which the gospel bestows on mankind, are of all persons in the world the most inexcusable. The sins of heathens bear no proportion to ours, because they never enjoyed those means of knowledge, never had those blessings conferred upon them, which christians are partakers of; so that we may apply to our selves those severe words of the apostle in this epistle, "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" hear how our SAVIOUR aggravates the faults of men upon this account, of the wilfulness of them, and their being committed against the express knowledge of GOD's will; Luke xii. 47, 48. "The servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." The means and mercies of the gospel are

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are so many talents committed to our trust, of the neglect whereof a severe account will be taken at the day of judgment. If we be wilful offenders, there is no excuse for us, and little hopes of pardon. "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth," (says the apostle in this epistle) "there remains no more sacrifice for sin." I know the apostle speaks this particularly of the sin of apostasy from christianity; but it is in proportion true of all other sins, which those who have received the knowledge of the truth are guilty of. They, who after they have entertained christianity, and made some progress in it, and been in some measure reformed by it, do again relapse into any vicious course, do thereby render their condition very dangerous. So St. Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Therefore we may do well to consider seriously what we do, when under the means and opportunities of knowledge which the gospel affords us, and the inestimable blessings and favours which it confers upon us, we live in any wicked and vicious course. Our sins are not of a common rate, when they have so much of wilfulness and unworthiness in them. If men shall be severely punish'd for living against the light of nature; what vengeance shall be poured on those who

Who offend against the glorious light of the gospel? SERM.
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"this is the condemnation, that light is come, &c."

3dly, The consideration of what hath been said is matter of comfort to those, who upon every failing and infirmity are afraid they have committed "the unpardonable sin," and that it is impossible for them to be restor'd by repentance. There are many who being of a dark and melancholy temper, are apt to represent things worse to themselves than there is reason for, and do many times fancy themselves guilty of great crimes, in the doing or neglecting of those things which in their nature are indifferent, are apt to aggravate and blow up every little infirmity into an unpardonable sin. Most men are apt to extenuate their sins; and not to be sensible enough of the evil and heinousness of them; but it is the peculiar infelicity of melancholy persons to look upon their faults as blacker and greater than in truth they are; and whatsoever they hear and read in scripture, that is spoken against the grossest and most enormous offenders, they apply to themselves; and when they hear of the "sin against the HOLY GHOST," and "the sin unto death," or read this text which I am now treating of, they presently conclude that they are guilty of these sins, and that this is a description of their case. Whereas "the sin against the HOLY GHOST" is of that nature, that probably none but those that saw our SAVIOUR'S miracles are capable of committing it; and excepting that, there is no sin whatsoever that is unpardonable. As for "the sin unto death," and that here spoken of in the text, I have shewn that they are a total apostasy from the christian religion, more especially

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to the heathen idolatry; which these persons I am speaking of, have no reason to imagine themselves guilty of. And though great and notorious crimes committed by christians may come near to this, and it may be very hard for those who are guilty of them, to recover themselves again to repentance; yet to be sure, for the common frailties and infirmities of humane nature, there is an open way of pardon in the gospel, and they are many times forgiven to us upon a general repentance; so that upon account of these, which is commonly the case of the persons I am speaking of, there is not the least ground of despair; and though it be hard many times for such persons to receive comfort, yet it is easy to give it, and that upon sure grounds, and as clear evidence of scripture, as there is for any thing; so that the first thing that such persons, who are so apt to judge thus hardly of themselves, are to be convinced of (if possible) is this, that they ought rather to trust the judgment of others concerning themselves, than their own imagination, which is so distemper'd, that it cannot make a true representation of things. I know that where melancholy does mightily prevail, it is hard to persuade people of this: but till they be persuaded of it, I am sure all the reason in the world will signify nothing to them.

4thly, This should make men afraid of great and presumptuous sins, which come near apostasy from christianity; such as deliberate murder, adultery, gross fraud and oppression, or notorious and habitual intemperance. For what great difference is there, whether men renounce christianity; or professing to believe it, "do in their works deny it?" some of these sins which I have mention'd, particularly

Early murder and adultery, were ranked in the same degree with apostasy by the ancient church; and so severe was the discipline of many churches, that persons guilty of these crimes were never admitted to the peace and communion of the church again, whatever testimony they gave of their repentance. I will not say but this was too rigorous; but this shews how inconsistent with christianity these crimes, and others of the like degree of heinousness, were in those days thought to be. They did not indeed, as Tertullian tells us, think such persons absolutely incapable of the mercy of God; but after such a fall, so notorious a contradiction to their christian profession, they thought it unfit afterwards that they should ever be reckon'd in the number of christians.

5thly, It may be useful for us upon this occasion to reflect a little upon the ancient discipline of the church, which in some places (as I have told you) was so severe, as in case of some great crimes after baptism, as apostasy to the heathen idolatry, murder, and adultery, never to admit those that were guilty of them, to the peace and communion of the church; but all churches were so strict, as not to admit those who fell after baptism into great and notorious crimes, to reconciliation with the church, but after a long and tedious course of penance, after the greatest and most publick testimonies of sorrow and repentance, after long fasting and tears, and the greatest signs of humiliation that can be imagined. In case of the greatest offences they were seldom reconciled, till they came to lie upon their death-beds: and in case of other scandalous sins, not 'till after the humiliation of many years. This perhaps may be thought too great severity; but I am sure we are as

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much too remiss now, as they were over-rigorous then: but was the ancient discipline of the church in any degree put in practice now, what case would the generality of christians be in? in what herds and shoals would men be driven out of the communion of the church? 'tis true, the prodigious degeneracy and corruption of christians hath long since broke these bounds, and 'tis morally impossible to revive the strictness of the ancient discipline in any measure, till the world grow better; but yet we ought to reflect, with shame and confusion of face, upon the purer ages of the church, and sadly to consider, how few among us would in those days have been accounted christians; and upon this consideration to be provoked to an emulation of those better times, and to a reformation of those faults and miscarriages, which in the best days of christianity were reckon'd inconsistent with the christian profession; and to remember that though the discipline of the church be not now the same it was then, yet the judgment and severity of God is; and that those who live in any vicious course of life, though they continue in the communion of the church, yet they shall be "shut
" out of the kingdom of God." "We are sure
" that the judgment of God will be according to
" truth, against them which commit such things."

6thly, and lastly, the consideration of what hath been said, should confirm and establish us in the profession of our holy religion. 'Tis true, we are not now in danger of apostatizing from christianity to the heathen idolatry; but we have too many sad examples of those who apostatize from the profession of the gospel, which they have taken upon them in baptism, to atheism and infidelity, to all manner of impiety

impiety and lewdness. There are many who daily ^{SERM.} fall off from the profession of the reformed religion, ^{CXXI.} to the gross errors and superstitions of the Roman church, which in many things does too nearly resemble the old pagan idolatry. And what the apostle here says of the apostates of his time, is proportionably true of those of our days, that "they who thus fall away," it is "extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance." And it ought to be remembered, that the guilt of this kind of apostasy hath driven some to despair; as in the case of Spira, who, for resisting the light and convictions of his mind, was cast into those agonies, and fill'd with such terrors, as if "the very pains of hell had taken hold on him;" and in that fearful despair, and in the midst of those horrors, he breathed out his soul.

"Let us then hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;" and let us take heed how we contradict the profession of our faith, by any impiety and wickedness in our lives; remembering that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." I will conclude with the words of the apostle immediately after the text, "the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." And how gladly would I add the next words! "but, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."

S E R M O N CXXII.

CHRIST the author, and obedience the condition of salvation.

H E B. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

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THIS is spoken of CHRIST, our great high-priest under the gospel; upon the excellency of whose person, and the efficacy of his sacrifice for the eternal benefit and salvation of mankind, the apostle insists so largely in this, and the following chapters; but the sum of all is briefly comprehended in the text, that our high-priest “being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.”

In which words we have these four things considerable.

1st, the great blessing and benefit here spoken of, and that is “eternal salvation;” and this implies in it, not only our deliverance from hell, and redemption from eternal misery; but the obtaining of eternal life and happiness for us.

2dly, the author of this great blessing and benefit to mankind; and that is “JESUS CHRIST the SON of GOD,” who is here represented to us under the notion of our high-priest, who, by making atonement for us, and reconciling us to GOD, is said to be the “author of eternal salvation” to mankind.

3dly,

3dly, the way and means whereby he became ^{SERM.} the author of our salvation; "being made perfect, ^{CXXII.}
 "he became the author of eternal salvation." The word is *τηλειωθεῖς*, having consummated his work, and finish'd his course, and receiv'd the reward of it. For this word hath an allusion to those that run in a race, where he that wins receives the crown. And to this the apostle plainly alludes, Phil. iii. 12. where he says, "not as though I had already attained," *ἐχ' ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον*, not as if I had already taken hold of the prize; but I am pressing, or reaching forward towards it; *ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι*, or were already perfect; that is, not as if I had finish'd my course, or had the prize or crown in my hand; but I am pressing forward towards it. In like manner, our blessed SAVIOUR, when he had finish'd the course of his humiliation and obedience, which was accomplish'd in his sufferings, and had receiv'd the reward of them, being risen from the dead, and exalted to the right-hand of GOD, and crown'd with glory and honour, he is said to be *τελειωθεῖς* made perfect; and therefore when he was giving up the ghost upon the cross, he said, John xix. 30. "*τετέλειται*, it is finish'd," or perfected; that is, he had done all that was necessary to be done, by way of suffering, for our redemption. And the same word is likewise used Luke xiii. 32. concerning our SAVIOUR's sufferings, "I do cure
 "to day and to morrow, *καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ τελευτῶμαι*, and
 "the third day I shall be perfected;" this he spake concerning his own death. And therefore chap. ii. 10. GOD is said "to make the captain
 "of our salvation perfect through sufferings; *ὁ δὲ
 "παθιμὰ τῶν τελευτῶσαι.*" And thus our high-priest
 being

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being made perfect in this sense, that is, having finish'd his course, which was accomplished in his sufferings, and having received the reward of them, in being exalted at the right-hand of God, "he became the author of eternal salvation to us."

4thly, you have here the qualifications of the persons, who are made partakers of this great benefit, or the condition upon which it is suspended, and that is "obedience;" "he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him."

These are the main things contained in the text. For the fuller explication whereof, I shall take into consideration these five things.

1st, how, and by what means CHRIST is the "author of our salvation."

2dly, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3dly, we will consider the possibility of performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4thly, the necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

And 5thly, I shall shew that this is no prejudice to the law "of faith," and the "free grace and mercy of God," declared in the gospel.

1st, we will consider how, and by what means "CHRIST is the author of our salvation," and this is contain'd in these words, "being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation," that is (as I told you before) having finish'd his course which was accomplish'd in his last sufferings; and having received the reward of them, being exalted at the

right

right-hand of GOD, he became the "author of eternal salvation" to us; so that by all he did, and suffer'd for us, in the days of his flesh, and in the state of his humiliation, and by all that he still continues to do for us, now that he is in heaven at the right-hand of GOD; he hath effected and brought about the great work of our salvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and sufferings, his resurrection from the dead, and his powerful intercession for us at the right-hand of GOD, have all a great influence upon the reforming and saving of mankind; and by all these ways and means, he is the author and cause of our salvation; as a rule, and as a pattern, as a propitiation, and as a patron and advocate that is continually pleading our cause, and interceding with GOD on our behalf, "for mercy and grace to help in time of need."

And indeed our condition requir'd an high-priest who was qualified in all these respects, for the recovery of mankind out of that corrupt and degenerate state into which it was sunk; an high-priest whose lips should preserve knowledge," and from whose mouth we might learn the law of GOD; whose life should be a perfect pattern of holiness to us, and his death a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and by whose grace and assistance we should be endowed with power and strength to mortify our lusts; and to perfect holiness in the fear of GOD; and therefore "such an high-priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who might have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and being himself compass'd with infirmities, might have the feeling of ours, being in all points tempted as we are, only with-

SERM. "out sin;" and in a word, "might be able to
 CXXII. "save to the utmost all those that come to God by
 "him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for
 "us."

By these qualifications our high-priest is described in this epistle; and by these he is every way suited to all our defects and infirmities, all our wants and necessities; to instruct our ignorance by his doctrine, and to lead us in the path of righteousness by his most holy and most exemplary life; to expiate the guilt of our sins by his death; and to procure grace and assistance for us, by his prevalent intercession on our behalf. By all these ways, and in all these respects, he is said to be "the author of eternal salvation."

1st, by the holiness and purity of his doctrine, whereby we are perfectly instructed in the will of God and our duty, and powerfully excited and persuaded to the practice of it. The rules and directions of a holy life were very obscure before, and the motives and encouragements to virtue but weak and ineffectual, in comparison of what they are now render'd by the revelation of the gospel. The general corruption of mankind, and the vicious practice of the world, had in a great measure blurr'd and defac'd the natural law; so that the heathen world, for many ages, had but a very dark and doubtful knowledge of their duty, especially as to several instances of it. The custom of several vices had so prevail'd among mankind, as almost quite to extinguish the natural sense of their evil and deformity. And the Jews, who enjoy'd a considerable degree of divine revelation, had no strict regard to the morality of their actions; and contenting themselves with some kind of outward conformity to the

the bare letter of the ten commandments, were al-^{SERM.}
most wholly taken up with little ceremonies and ob-^{CXXII.}
servances, in which they placed the main of their
religion, almost wholly neglecting the greater duties
and "weightier matters of the law."

And therefore our blessed SAVIOUR, to free man-
kind from these wanderings and uncertainties about
the will of GOD, revealed the moral law, and ex-
plained the full force and meaning of it, clearing all
doubts, and supplying all the defects of it, by a
more particular and explicit declaration of the se-
veral parts of our duty, and by precepts of greater
perfection, than the world was sufficiently acquainted
withal before; of greater humility and more uni-
versal charity; of abstaining from revenge and for-
giving injuries, and returning to our enemies good
for evil, and love for ill-will, and blessings and
prayers for curses and persecutions. These virtues
indeed were sometimes, and yet but very rarely, re-
commended before in the counsels of wise men; but
either not in that degree of perfection, or not under
that degree of necessity, and as having the force of
laws, and laying an universal obligation of indispen-
sible duty upon all mankind.

And as our blessed SAVIOUR hath given a greater
clearness, and certainty, and perfection, to the rule
of our duty, so he hath reveal'd, and brought into
a clearer light, more powerful motives and encou-
ragements to the constant and careful practice of it;
for "life and immortality are brought to light by
the gospel;" the resurrection of CHRIST from
the dead being a plain and convincing demonstra-
tion of the immortality of our souls, and another
life after this, and an evidence to us both of his

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power, and of the fidelity of his promise, to raise us from the dead. Not but that mankind had some obscure apprehensions of these things before. Good men had always good hopes of another life and future rewards in another world; and the worst of men were not without some fears of the judgment and vengeance of another world; but men had disputed themselves into great doubts and uncertainties about these things; and as men that are in doubt, are almost indifferent which way they go; so the uncertain apprehensions which men had of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments of another world had but a very faint influence upon the minds of men, and wanted that pressing and determining force to virtue and a good life, which a firm belief and clear conviction of these things would have infused into them.

But now "the light of the glorious gospel of "CHRIST" hath scattered all these clouds, and chased away that gross darkness which hid the other world from our sight, and hath removed all doubt concerning the immortality of mens souls, and the future state; and now the kingdom of heaven, with all its treasures of life and happiness, and glory, lie open to our view, and "hell is also naked before us, and destruction hath no covering." So that the hopes and fears of men are now perfectly awakened, and all sorts of considerations that may serve to quicken and encourage our obedience, and to deter and affrighten men from a wicked life, are exposed to the view of all men, and do stare every man's conscience in the face. And this is that which renders the gospel so admirable and powerful an instrument for the reforming of mankind, and,

the apostle calls it "the mighty power of God unto salvation;" because therein life and immortality are set before us, as the certain and glorious reward of our obedience; and therein also "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." So that considering the perfection of our rule, and the powerful enforcements of it upon the consciences of men, by the clear discovery and firm assurance of the eternal recompence of another world; nothing can be imagined better suited to its end, than the doctrine of the gospel is to make men wise, and holy, and good unto salvation; both by instructing them perfectly in their duty, and urging them powerfully to the practice of it.

2dly, the example of our SAVIOUR's life is likewise another excellent means to this end. The law lays an obligation upon us; but a pattern gives life and encouragement, and renders our duty more easy, and practicable, and familiar to us; for here we see obedience to the divine law practised in our own nature, and performed by a man like ourselves, "in all things like unto us, sin only excepted." 'Tis true indeed, this exception makes a great difference, and seems to take off very much from the encouraging force and virtue of this example. No wonder if he that was without sin, and was God as well as man, performed all righteousness; and therefore, where is the encouragement of this example? that our nature, pure and uncorrupted, supported and assisted by the divinity to which it was united, should be perfectly conformed to the law of God, as it is no strange thing, so neither doth it seem to have that force and encouragement in it, which an example
more

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more suited to our weakness might have had. But then this cannot be deny'd, that it hath the advantage of perfection, which a pattern ought to have, and to which, though we can never attain, yet we may always be aspiring towards it; and certainly we cannot better learn, how GOD would have men to live, than by seeing how GOD himself lived, when he was pleased to assume our nature, and to become man.

And then, we are to consider that the SON of GOD did not assume our nature in its highest glory and perfection, but compass'd with infirmities, and liable in all points to be tempted like as we are; but still it was without sin; and therefore GOD doth not exact from us perfect obedience, and that we should "fulfil all righteousness," as he did; he makes allowance for the corruption of our nature, and is pleased to accept of our sincere, though very imperfect obedience. But after all this, his humane nature was united to his divinity, and he had the "SPIRIT without measure;" and this would indeed make a wide difference between us and our pattern, as to the purpose of holiness and obedience, if we were destitute of that assistance which is necessary to enable us to the discharge of our duty; but this GOD offers, and is ready to afford to us, for he hath promised "to give his HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him;" and "the SPIRIT of him that raised up CHRIST JESUS from the dead" dwells in all good men, who sincerely desire to do the will of GOD; "in the working out our salvation, GOD worketh in us both to will and to do."

So that as to that obedience which the gospel requires of us, if we be not wanting to ourselves; if

we do not "receive the grace of GOD in vain," and "quench and resist his blessed SPIRIT," we may be as really assisted as the SON of GOD himself was; for, in this respect, all true and sincere Christians are "the SONS of GOD;" so that St. Paul tells us, Rom. viii. 14. "As many as are led by the SPIRIT of GOD, they are the sons of GOD."

So that if all things be duly consider'd, the life of our blessed SAVIOUR, as it is the most perfect, so in the main, it is a very proper pattern for our imitation, and could not have come nearer to us, without wanting that perfection which is necessary to a complete and absolute pattern. The SON of GOD condescended to every thing that might render him the most familiar and equal example to us, excepting that, which as it was impossible, so had been infinitely dishonourable to him, and would have spoil'd the perfection of his example; he came as near to us as was fit or possible "being in all things like unto us, sin only excepted;" that is, abating that one thing, which he came to destroy and abolish, and which would have destroyed the very end of his coming; for if he had not been "without sin," he could neither have made an expiation for sin, nor have been a perfect pattern of holiness and obedience.

And as the life of our blessed SAVIOUR had all the perfection that is requisite to an absolute pattern so that by considering his temper and spirit, and the actions of his life, we may reform all the vicious inclinations of our minds, and the exorbitances of our passions, and the errors and irregularities of our (lives) so it is a very powerful example, and of great force to oblige and provoke us to the imitation of it;

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it; for it is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and have reason to love, above any person in the world: the example of our prince and sovereign lord, of our best friend and greatest benefactor, of the high-priest of our profession, and the captain of our salvation, of the author and finisher of our faith, of one who came down from heaven for our sakes, and was contented to assume our nature together with the infirmities of it, and to live in a low and mean condition, for no other reason but that he might have the opportunity to instruct and lead mankind in the way to life, to deliver us from sin and wrath, and to bring us to God and happiness. 'Tis the example of one who laid down his life for us, and sealed his love to us in his blood, and whilst we were enemies, did and suffered more for us, than ever any man did for his friend.

And surely these considerations cannot but mightily recommend and endear to us this example of our LORD and SAVIOUR. We are ambitious to imitate those whom we highly esteem and reverence, and are apt to have their examples in great veneration, from whom we have received great kindnesses and benefits, and are always endeavouring to be like those whom we love, and are apt to conform ourselves to the will and pleasure of those from whom we have received great favours, and who are continually heaping great obligations upon us.

So that whether we consider the excellency of our pattern, or the mighty endearments of it to us, by that infinite love and kindness which he hath expressed towards us, we have all the temptation, and all the provocation in the world, to endeavour to be like him; for who would not gladly tread in the

steps of the SON of GOD, and of the best friend that the sons of men ever had? who will not follow that example to which we stand indebted for the greatest blessings and benefits that ever were procured for mankind? thus you see of what force and advantage the example of our blessed SAVIOUR is toward the recovery and salvation of mankind.

3dly, he is "the author of eternal salvation," as he hath purchased it for us, by the merit of his obedience and sufferings, by which he hath obtained eternal redemption for us; not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but eternal life and happiness, when by our sins we had justly incurred the wrath and displeasure of almighty GOD, and were liable to eternal death and misery. He was contented to be substituted a sacrifice for us, "to bear our sins in his own body on the tree," and to expiate the guilt of all our offences by his own sufferings. He died for us, that is, not only for our benefit and advantage, but in our place and stead; so that if he had not died we had eternally perish'd; and because he died, we are saved from that eternal ruin and punishment, which was due to us for our sins.

And this, tho' it be no where in scripture call'd by the name or term of satisfaction, yet, which is the same thing in effect, it is call'd "the prize of our redemption;" for as we are sinners, we are liable and indebted to the justice of GOD, and our blessed SAVIOUR by his death and sufferings hath discharged this obligation; which discharge, since it was obtained for us by "the shedding of his precious blood," "without which," the scripture expressly says, "there had been no remission of sin," why it may not properly enough be called payment

and satisfaction, I confess I cannot understand. Not that GOD was angry with his SON, for he was always well pleased with him; or that our SAVIOUR suffer'd the very same which the sinner should have done in his own person, the proper pains and torments of the damned: but that his perfect obedience and grievous sufferings, undergone for our sakes and upon our account, were of that value and esteem with GOD, and his voluntary sacrifice of himself in our stead, so highly acceptable and well pleasing to him, that he thereupon was pleased to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind; wherein he hath promised and engaged himself to forgive the sins of all those who sincerely repent and believe, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence it is, that the blood of CHRIST, which was shed for us upon the cross, is call'd "the blood of the covenant;" as being the sanction of that new covenant of the gospel, into which GOD is enter'd with mankind; and not only the confirmation, but the very foundation of it; for which reason, the cup in the LORD's supper (which represents to us the blood of CHRIST) is call'd "the new testament in his blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins."

4thly, and lastly, CHRIST is said to be "the author of our salvation," in respect of his powerful and perpetual intercession for us at the right-hand of GOD. And this seems to be more especially intimated and intended, in that expression here in the text that "being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him." Which words of "his being perfected," do, as I have shew'd before, more immediately refer to his sufferings

ings, and the reward that followed them, "his exaltation at the right hand of God," where "he lives for ever to make intercession for us;" by which perpetual and most prevalent intercession of his, he procures all those benefits to be bestowed upon us, which he purchased for us by his death; the forgiveness of our sins, and our acceptance with God, and perfect restitution to his favour, upon our faith and repentance, and the grace and assistance of God's HOLY SPIRIT to enable us to a sincere discharge of our duty, to strengthen us against all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to keep us from all evil, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

And this is that which our apostle calls "obtaining of mercy, and finding grace to help in time of need," chap. iv. ver. 16. of this epist. Our blessed SAVIOUR now that he is advanced into heaven, and "exalted on the right-hand of the majesty on high," doth out of the tenderest affection and compassion to mankind, still prosecute that great and merciful design of our salvation, which was begun by him here on earth, and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and sufferings does offer up our prayers to God, and as it were plead our cause with God, and represent to him all our wants and necessities, and obtain a favourable answer of our petitions put up to God in his name, and all necessary supplies of grace and strength, proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And by virtue of this powerful intercession of our blessed SAVIOUR and REDEEMER, our sins are pardoned upon our sincere repentance, our prayers are graciously answered, our wants are abundantly supplied,

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plied, and the grace and assistance of GOD'S SPIRIT are plentifully afforded to us, to excite us to our duty, to strengthen us in well doing, to comfort us in afflictions, to support us under the greatest trials and sufferings, and "to keep us through faith unto salvation."

And for this reason, as the purchasing of our salvation is in scripture attributed to the death and sufferings of CHRIST; so the perfecting and finishing of it is ascribed to the prevalency of his intercession at the right-hand of GOD for us. So the apostle tells us, chap. vii. ver. 25. that "he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to GOD by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." He died once to purchase salvation for us; and that we may not fall short of it, but receive the full benefit of this purchase, "he lives for ever to make intercession for us;" and thus "he saves to the uttermost all those that come to GOD by him;" that is, he takes care of the whole business of our salvation from first to last. And now that he is in heaven, he is as intent to procure our welfare and happiness, and as tenderly concerned for us, as when he lived here among us upon earth, as when he hung upon the cross, and "poured out his soul an offering for our sins;" for he appears at the right-hand of GOD in our nature, that which he assumed for our sakes, which was made subject to, and sensible of our infirmities, and which "was tempted in all things like as we are, only without sin;" and therefore "he knows how to pity and succour them that are tempted;" and from the remembrance of his own sufferings, is prompted to a compassionate sense of ours, and

never

never ceaseth in virtue of his blood, which was shed SERM.
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for us, to plead our cause with GOD, and to inter-
cede powerfully in our behalf.

So that the virtue and efficacy of CHRIST's intercession on our behalf, is founded in the redemption, which he wrought for us, by his blood and sufferings; which, being enter'd into heaven, he represents to GOD on our behalf. As the high-priest under the law did enter into the holy place, with the blood of the sacrifice that had been offered, and in virtue of that blood interceded for the people: "so CHRIST by his own blood enter'd into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us:" as the apostle speaks, chap. ix. ver. 12. he enter'd into "the holy place," that is "into heaven it self," to make intercession for us, as the apostle explains himself, ver. 24. "CHRIST is not enter'd into the holy places which are made with hands; but into heaven it self, to appear in the presence of GOD for us." And chap. x. ver. 12. speaking of CHRIST's appearing for us at the right-hand of GOD, "this man" (says he) after he had offer'd one sacrifice for sin "for ever" (that is, a sacrifice of perpetual virtue and efficacy) "sat down at the right-hand of GOD," that is to intercede for us in virtue of that sacrifice.

From all which it appears that the virtue of CHRIST's mediation and intercession for us in heaven, is founded in his sacrifice, and the price of our redemption which he paid on earth, in shedding his blood for us.

From whence the apostle reasons, that "there is but one mediator between GOD and man," by whom we are to address our prayers to GOD;
1 Tim.

SERM. I Tim. ii. 5. "There is one GOD, and one mediator between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all." His mediation is founded in his ransom, or the price which he paid for our redemption. The apostle indeed does not say there is "but one mediator" between GOD and man in express words, but surely he means so; if by saying "there is one GOD," he means there is but one GOD; for they are joined together, and the very same expression used concerning both; "there is one GOD, and one mediator between GOD and men:" that is, there is "but one GOD, and one mediator." But then, they of the church of Rome endeavour to avoid this plain text, by distinguishing between a mediator of redemption, and a mediator of intercession: but now if CHRIST's mediation, by way of intercession, be founded in the virtue of his redemption; then if there be but one mediator of redemption, then there is but one mediator of intercession in heaven for us. "There is one GOD and one mediator between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all." So that the power and prevalency of his intercession is founded in his ransom, that is, the price of our redemption; in virtue whereof alone he intercedes with GOD for us as the apostle to the Hebrews does most plainly assert. So that all other intercessors in heaven for us are excluded from offering and presenting our prayers to GOD, besides "our high-priest, who is at the right-hand of GOD, and lives for ever, to make intercession for us," and by virtue of his intercession, "is able to save to the uttermost all those

"the

“that come to GOD by him,” that is, who put up their prayers to GOD in the alone virtue of his mediation. So that as there is no need of any other, if his intercession be available “to save to the uttermost:” so there is great danger in applying to any other (whether saint or angel, or even the blessed virgin) if the benefit of his intercession be limited to those “who come to GOD by him.” And thus I have shewn by what means CHRIST is the author of our salvation; which was the first thing propos’d to be consider’d. I proceed to the

Second thing I propos’d to enquire into; namely, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification in those who hope for eternal salvation. And this I shall explain, first negatively, and then positively.

First, negatively; it is not a meer outward profession of the christian religion, and owning of CHRIST for our LORD and lawgiver, that will be accepted in this case. “Not every one that saith unto me, LORD, LORD, (saith our SAVIOUR) shall enter into the kingdom of GOD.” By which we may very reasonably understand, all that profession of religion, which falls short of obedience and a holy life; as the profession of faith in CHRIST, being baptized into his name and religion, the mere belief of his doctrine, and the owning of him for our LORD and SAVIOUR; no, nor the external worship of him, and profession of subjection to him, by prayer and hearing his word and communicating in the holy sacrament. No, though this be set off in the most glorious manner, by prophesying and working miracles in his name; for so it follows in the next words, “many shall

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“ shall say to me in that day, LORD, LORD
 “ have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy
 “ name have cast out devils, and in thy name have
 “ done many wondrous works? we have eat and
 “ drunk in thy presence, and have heard thee
 “ preach in our streets.” But he tells us, that
 nothing of all this, without obedience to his laws
 will be sufficient to gain us admission into heaven.

2dly, positively; that which GOD requires as a
 condition, and will accept as a qualification in those
 who hope for eternal life, is faith in CHRIST and
 a sincere and universal obedience to the precepts
 of his holy gospel. “ Not every one that saith
 “ unto me, LORD, LORD, shall enter into the
 “ kingdom of GOD: but he that doth the will of
 “ my FATHER which is in heaven.” And here in
 the text it is expressly said, that “ CHRIST is the
 “ author of eternal salvation to them that obey him
 “ τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ,” to them that hearken to
 him; that is, to them that do so hear and believe
 his gospel, as to obey it; to them, and no other
 he is “ the author of eternal salvation.”

And that we may the more clearly and distinctly
 understand what obedience it is, which the gospel
 exacts as an indispensable condition of eternal salva-
 tion, and a necessary qualification in all those who
 hope to be made partakers of it; we may be
 pleased to consider, that there is a virtual and an
 actual obedience to the laws of GOD; a perfect and
 sincere obedience to them; the explication of these
 terms, will give us a distinct conception of the thing
 we are speaking of.

1st, there is a virtual, and there is an actual obe-
 dience to the laws of GOD. By an actual obedience

I mean

I mean the practice and exercise of the several graces and virtues of christianity, and the course and tenor of a holy life; when "out of a good conversation men do shew forth their works," and by the outward actions of their lives, do give real testimony of their piety, justice, sobriety, humility, meekness, and charity, and all other christian graces and virtues, as occasion is ministered for the practice and exercise of them.

By a virtual obedience, I mean a sincere belief of the gospel, of the holiness and equity of its precepts, of the truth of its promises, and the terror of its threatenings, and a true repentance for all our sins. This is obedience in the root and principle; for he who sincerely believes the gospel, and does truly repent of the errors and miscarriages of his life, is firmly resolved to obey the commandments of God, and to walk before him, in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life; so that there is nothing that prevents or hinders this man's actual obedience to the laws of God, in the course of a holy and good life, but only the want of time and opportunity for it. And this was the case of those, who, upon the hearing of the gospel when it was first preached to them, did heartily embrace it, and turn from their sins, and the worship of idols, to the true and living God, but perhaps were cut off soon after; (as there were many who being but newly gained to christianity, were presently put to death, and suffer'd martyrdom for that profession;) there is no doubt to be made, but that in this case, a virtual obedience was in such persons a sufficient qualification for eternal life.

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But where there is time and opportunity for the exercise of our obedience, and the practice of the virtues of a holy life, there actual obedience to the laws and precepts of the gospel is necessary, to qualify us for eternal happiness; so that tho' a man do sincerely believe the gospel, and truly repent of his sins and resolve upon a better life; yet if he do not afterwards in the course of his life put this resolution in practice, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," and amendment of life, and persevere in a holy course, his first resolution of obedience, though were sincere, will not avail him to salvation. Nay if he should continue for some time in the resolution and practice of a holy and virtuous life, and afterwards fall off from it, and "turn from the holy commandment deliver'd unto him, his latter end would be worse than his beginning; all his righteousness that he hath done would not be remembered; he shall die in his iniquity." For "without holiness no man shall see the LORD." "If any man draw back, God's soul will have no pleasure in him." This is so very clear and plain from scripture, that no man can entertain a contrary persuasion, without contradicting the whole tenor of the bible.

The sum of what I have said is this, that a virtuous obedience and sincere faith and repentance are sufficient, where there is no time and opportunity for actual obedience and the practice of a good life: but where there is opportunity for actual obedience, and the continued practice of a good life, and perseverance therein; they are indispensably necessary in order to our eternal salvation, and a well grounded hope and assurance of it.

2dly, the

2dly, there is a perfect, and there is a sincere obedience. Perfect obedience consists in the exact conformity of our hearts and lives to the law of God, without the least imperfection, and without failing in any point or degree of our duty. And this obedience, as it is not consistent with the frailty and infirmity of corrupt nature, and the imperfection of our present state, so neither doth God require it of us as a necessary condition of eternal life. We are indeed commanded to be "perfect, as our FATHER which is in heaven is perfect:" but we are not to understand this strictly and rigorously; for that is not only impossible to men in this present state of imperfection, but absolutely impossible to humane nature, for "men to be perfect as God is perfect:" but the plain meaning of this precept is, that we should imitate those divine perfections of goodness, and mercy, and patience, and purity, and endeavour to be as like God in all these as we can, and be still aspiring after a nearer resemblance of him, as may be evident to any one who considers the connexion and occasion of these words.

By a sincere obedience, I mean such a conformity of our lives and actions to the law of God, as to the general course and tenor of them, that we do not live in the habitual practice of any known sin, or in the customary neglect of any material or considerable part of our known duty; and that we be not wilfully and deliberately guilty of the single act of heinous and notorious sins, as I have formerly explained this matter more at large, in another discourse. And this obedience, even in the best of men, is mixt with great frailty and imperfection; but yet because it is the utmost that we can do in this state of

infirmity and imperfection, the terms of the gospel are so merciful and gracious, as that GOD is pleased for the sake of the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR, to accept this sincere, though imperfect obedience, and to reward it with eternal life. And this, I doubt not, after all the intricate disputes, and infinite controversies about this business, is the true and clear state of the matter.

And this sincere obedience which the gospel requires of us, as a condition of our happiness, though it be sometimes called by divines, evangelical perfection; yet it is but very improperly so called; for nothing is properly perfect to which any thing is wanting; and great defects and imperfections must needs be acknowledged in the obedience of the best and holiest men upon earth; and they who pretend to perfection in this life, do neither understand the law of GOD, nor themselves, but (as St. John says of such persons) “ they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them;” and besides other imperfections, these two are evident in them, ignorance and pride.

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to this second particular, namely, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification for eternal life.

S E R M O N CXXIII.

The possibility and necessity of gospel-obedience, and its consistence with free grace.

H E B. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

FOR the explication of these words, I propos'd S E R M.
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to consider these five things.

1st, How and by what means **C H R I S T** is the The se-
cond ser-
mon on
this text.
author of our salvation.

2dly, What obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3dly, The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4thly, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

5thly, The consistency of this method and means of our salvation with the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God declared in the gospel.

I have handled the two first of these, and now proceed to the

Third thing I propos'd to consider, viz. the possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel. For if

C H R I S T

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CHRIST be "the author of eternal salvation only to those who obey him;" then those who live in disobedience to the gospel are in a state of damnation. But there cannot be the guilt of disobedience, where obedience is impossible; no man being guilty, or justly liable to punishment, for the not doing of that, which it was no ways possible for him to do. Therefore the covenant of the gospel, into which GOD is enter'd with mankind, doth necessarily suppose the possibility of performing the condition of it; otherwise it leaves them in as bad a condition as they were in before, because it only offers new blessings and benefits to us, but sets us never the nearer the obtaining of them, if so be the condition upon which they are granted be altogether impossible to us; nay, it renders our state many degrees worse, if our not performing the condition of such gracious offers brings us under new and greater guilt.

If it be said, that some persons have great benefit by it, because they by an especial and effectual grace shall be enabled to perform the conditions of this covenant; is not this a mighty straitning to the grace and mercy of the gospel, to confine it within so narrow a compass, as still to leave the greatest part of mankind in a worse condition, than if salvation had never been offer'd to them: as it certainly does, if (as this doctrine does necessarily suppose) the guilt and punishment of men shall be greatly increased and heightned by their contempt of, and disobedience to the gospel; when at the same time it is acknowledged, that it was not possible for those men to obey it; for want of that special and effectual grace, which is necessary to enable them thereto.

thereto. I do not love to handle these points con- S E R M.
tentionously, but this in my apprehension does as CXXIII.
much derogate from the amplitude and riches of
God's grace in the gospel, as any thing that can
easily be said.

And therefore, for the right stating and clearing
of this matter, I shall endeavour to make out these
three things.

1. That we are not sufficient of our selves, and
by any power in us, to perform the condition of the
gospel.

2. That the grace of G O D is ready to enable and
assist us to the performance of these conditions, if
we be not wanting to our selves.

3. That what the grace of G O D is ready to ena-
ble us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves, that
may properly be said to be possible to us, and, in
some sense, in our power.

1. That we are not sufficient of our selves, and
by any power in us, to perform the condition of the
gospel. The grace of G O D doth clearly appear in
the whole business of our salvation: " by grace ye
" are saved (says the apostle) and that not of your
" selves, it is the gift of G O D." Faith is the gift
of G O D, and so is repentance. " It is G O D that
" works in us both to will and to do of his own
" goodness;" that is, who both inclines and excites
us to that which is good, and enables us to do it.
" Without me (says C H R I S T) ye can do nothing."
And " through C H R I S T strengthening me" (saith
St. Paul) " I am able to do all things;" all things
which G O D requires of us, and expects to be done
by us in order to our salvation. Without the grace
of C H R I S T, " we are without strength; and are
" not

“ not sufficient of ourselves, as of ourselves, to think
 “ a good thought ;” that is, we are not sufficient
 of ourselves to design or resolve upon any thing that
 is good ; “ but our sufficiency is of God.”

The depravation of our nature hath brought a
 great impotency and disability upon us to that
 which is good ; and we have made ourselves much
 weaker by evil practice ; by the power of evil habits
 we are enslaved to our lusts, and “ sold under sin.” So
 that if at any time we are convinced of our duty
 and from that conviction have an inclination to
 that which is good, “ evil is present to us.” When
 the law of God gives us the knowledge of our du-
 ty, and stares our consciences in the face, “ there
 “ is another law in our members, warring against the
 “ law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity
 “ to the law of sin, which is in our members.”
 Sin brings us under the power of Satan, and gives
 him dominion over us. “ For his servants ye are
 “ whom ye obey ;” so that he rules and bears sway
 in us, and “ we are led captive by him at his plea-
 “ sure.” Evil and vicious habits are a kind of se-
 cond nature superinduced upon us, which takes
 away our power and liberty to that which is good
 and renders it impossible to us to raise and rescue our-
 selves ; so that “ we are prisoners and captives, ’till
 “ the Son of God sets us free ; and dead in trespasses
 “ and sins, ’till he gives us life.” And therefore
 the prophet represents the recovery of ourselves from
 the bondage of sin, by such things as are naturally
 impossible, to shew how great our weakness and im-
 potency is ; Jer. xiii. 23. “ Can the ethiopian change
 “ his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may ye
 “ also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.”

And by how much stronger the chains of our sins are, and the more unable we are to break loose from them; by so much the greater and more evident is the necessity of the divine assistance, and of the power of God's grace, to knock off those fetters, and to rescue us from this bondage and slavery.

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2. The grace of God is ready to assist and enable us to the performance of these conditions, that is, to faith and repentance, and all the purposes of obedience and a holy life; if we be not wanting to our selves, and do not reject or neglect to make use of that grace, which God offers us, and is ready to afford us in a very plentiful manner. And this is that which renders all the mercies of the gospel effectual (if it be not our own fault, and wilful neglect) to the great end and design of our salvation; and without this, all the gracious offers of the gospel would signify nothing at all to our advantage.

And this likewise is that which renders the unbelief and impenitency and disobedience of men utterly inexcusable; because nothing of all this does proceed from want of power, but of will to do better. And therefore this is so necessary an encouragement to all the endeavours of obedience and a good life, that men should be assured of God's readiness to assist and help them in the doing of their duty, that without this the revelation of the gospel, tho' never so clear, would signify nothing to us, all the precepts and directions for a good life, and the most vehement persuasions and exhortations to obedience, would have no force and life in them; for what signifies it to direct the dead, and speak to them that cannot hear, and to persuade men, tho' it were with

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SERM. all the earnestness in the world, to those things which
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Therefore our blessed SAVIOUR, when he had laid down, and explained the precepts of holiness and virtue in his sermon upon the mount, to encourage them to what he had been directing and proposing to them, he assures them that God is ready to afford his grace and assistance to all those that are sincerely desirous to do his will, and do earnestly implore his grace and assistance to that purpose, Matth. vii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. "Ask (saith he) and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." So that if any man want the grace and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, it is his own fault; it is either for want of seeking, or for want of earnestness in asking; for our SAVIOUR expressly assures us, that he denies it to none; "for every one that asketh, receiveth."

And to give us a more lively and sensible assurance of this, he represents the care and kindness of God to men, by the affections of earthly parents to their children, who tho' they be many times evil themselves, yet are not wont to deny their children necessary good things, when they decently and dutifully beg them at their hands; "what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your FATHER which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?" Here is a general promise

and declaration, that upon our humble and earnest prayer to God, he will grant us whatever is good and necessary, by which is certainly intended in the first place, spiritual good things, because these are the best and most necessary; and to satisfy us that our SAVIOUR did in the first place, and more especially mean these, St. Luke does particularly instance in the grace and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT. Luke xi. 13. "How much more shall your heavenly FATHER give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him?" "the HOLY SPIRIT," that is, the continual presence and influence of it to all the purposes of guidance and direction, of grace and assistance, of comfort and support in our christian course.

And what else is the meaning of that parable of our SAVIOUR'S concerning the talents intrusted with every man, according to his capacity and opportunities, Matth. xxv. I say, what else can be the meaning of it but this? that GOD is before-hand with every man, by affording the advantages and opportunities of being happy, and such a measure of grace and assistance to that end, which if he faithfully improve, he shall be admitted "into the joy of his LORD."

And upon this consideration of the gracious promises of the gospel to this purpose, it is, that the apostle St. Paul doth so earnestly exhort christians to endeavour after the highest degree of universal holiness and purity, that we are capable of in this life; 2 Cor. vii. 1. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And so likewise Phil. ii. 12, 13. "Wherefore, my beloved, work out your

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“own salvation with fear and trembling” (that is, with great care and concernment, lest you should fall short of it) “for it is GOD that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.” The consideration of GOD’s readiness to assist us, and of his grace which is always at hand to stir up our wills to that which is good, and to strengthen us in the doing of it, ought to be a great argument and encouragement to us, to put forth our utmost endeavours, and so co-operate with the grace of GOD toward our own salvation.

And the apostle St. Peter useth the same argument to press men to use their utmost “diligence, to make their calling and election sure,” by abounding in all the virtues of a good life, 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. “According as his divine power hath given us all things which pertain to life and godliness.” (that is, hath so plentifully furnish’d us with all the requisites to a godly life) “through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (that is, by knowledge of the gospel and the grace therein offered to us) “whereby he hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” And then from the consideration of this divine power, conveyed to us by the gospel, and the promises of it, he exhorts men “to give all diligence, to add to their faith, virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly love and charity.”

And indeed the scripture every where ascribes our regeneration and sanctification, the beginning, and progress, and perseverance of our obedience, to the powerful

powerful grace and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT; we are said to be "regenerated and born again of the SPIRIT, to be renewed and sanctified by the HOLY GHOST, to be led by the SPIRIT, and by the SPIRIT to mortify the deeds of the flesh," and in a word, "to be kept by the mighty power of GOD through faith unto salvation."

3. What the grace of GOD is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves, may properly be said to be possible to us, and in some sense, in our power. That may be said to be possible to us, which tho' we "cannot do of our selves as of our selves," (that is by our own natural power) yet we can do by the help and assistance of another, if that assistance be ready to be afforded to us; as we are sure the grace of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT is, because he hath promised it to them that seek it, and "he is faithful who hath promised."

That cannot be said to be wholly out of any man's power, which he may have for asking; that which we are able to do by the strength and assistance of another, is not impossible to us. Surely St. Paul did no ways derogate from the grace of GOD when he said, "I am able to do all things thro' CHRIST strengthening me;" he reckons himself able to do all that which by the strength of CHRIST he was enabled to do.

And this is the true ground of all the persuasions and exhortations, which we meet with in scripture, to holiness and obedience, which would all be, not only to no purpose, but very unreasonable, if we were wholly destitute of power to do what GOD commands:

commands: but if he be always ready at hand to assist us by a grace sufficient for us, if he co-operate with us in the work of our salvation, then is there abundant ground of encouragement to our endeavours; and if we fall short of eternal salvation, it is wholly our own fault; it is not because God is wanting to us in those aids and assistances of his grace which are necessary; but because we are wanting to our selves, in not seeking God's grace more earnestly, or by neglecting to make use of it when it is afforded to us. For it is really all one, both to the encouragement of our endeavours, and to the rendering of our disobedience inexcusable, whether we be able of our selves to perform the condition of the gospel, or God be ready to assist us by his grace and HOLY SPIRIT to that purpose.

Wherefore, as the apostle exhorts, Heb. xii. 12, 13, 14, 15. "Lift up the hands which hang down," and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the LORD; looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;" intimating, that it is want of care and diligence on our part, if the grace of God fail of its end, and be not effectual to all the purposes of faith, and repentance, and obedience. God does not withhold his grace from us: but men may receive it in vain, if they do not make use of it. And thus I have done with the third thing I proposed to consider from these words. proceed to the

Fourth, viz. to consider the necessity of this obedience, in order to our obtaining of eternal life and happiness. "CHRIST is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;" that is, to such, and only to such, as live in obedience to the precepts of his holy gospel, to them who frame the general course of their lives according to his laws. Some men seem to be so afraid of the merit of obedience and good works, that they are loth to assert the necessity of them, and do it with so much caution, as if they were not thoroughly persuaded of it, or did apprehend some dangerous consequences of it: but this fear is perfectly groundless; as if merit could not be excluded, without casting off our duty, and releasing our selves from any necessary obligation to be good. For any man surely may easily discern a plain difference between a worthiness of desert, and a fitness of receiving a reward, being penitent and sorry for what he hath done; though he cannot deserve a pardon, yet he may thereby be qualified and made meet to receive it; though repentance do not make him worthy, yet it may make him capable of it, which an obstinate rebel, and one that persists in his disloyalty, is not. This is a thing so plain of itself, that it would be waste of time and words to insist longer upon the proof of it.

Now the necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness, relies upon these three grounds. 1st, upon the constitution and appointment of God.

2dly, the general reason of rewards.

3dly, upon the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience.

1st, the

1st, the constitution and appointment of God. "Eternal life is the gift of God;" and he may do what he will with his own, he may dispense his gifts and favours upon what terms and conditions he pleaseth; and therefore if he hath plainly declared, that "to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will give eternal life;" that "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;" but "if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life;" who shall resist his will, or dispute his pleasure? The right and authority of God in this matter is so unquestionable that it admits of no contest; and the blessings and benefits propos'd, are so infinitely great and invaluable, that no condition of obtaining them, which is possible to be perform'd by us, can be thought hard and unequal; so that we ought thankfully to receive so great a favour, let the terms and conditions of it be what they will; and if there were no other reason for the imposing of these conditions upon us, of faith, and repentance, and obedience but meerly the will and pleasure of God, this were enough to silence all objections against it.

But 2dly, the necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life, is likewise founded in the reason of rewards in general. For though the measure and degree of our reward so infinitely beyond the proportion of our best duty and service, as eternal life and happiness is, I say, though the measure and degree of this reward be founded in the immense bounty and goodness of God; yet the reason of reward in general, is necessarily founded in our obedience to God's laws; for according to the true nature

nature and reason of things, nothing but obedience capable of reward. For though authority may pardon the breach and transgressions of laws, and remit the punishment due thereto, yet to reward the contempt of laws, and wilful disobedience to them, is directly contrary to the design of government, and does plainly overthrow the very reason and end of all laws, and makes obedience and disobedience to be all one, if so be they are equally capable of reward: and therefore nothing can be more absurd and senseless, than for any man to hope to be rewarded by God, who does not live in a sincere obedience to his laws. "Every man that hath this hope in him," that is, in CHRIST JESUS, to be saved by him) "purifieth himself, even as he is pure;" that is, endeavours to be like him in the purity and obedience of his life: and nothing surely can be more unreasonable than to expect to be rewarded by the great governor and judge of the world, if we be disobedient to his laws; for where obedience to law is required, there all reason and equity and reward ceaseth. No wise prince can think fit to reward disloyalty and contempt of his laws; because to reward it, would be to encourage it; much less will God, the great and infinitely wise governor of the world.

3dly, the necessity of obedience will yet more evidently appear, if we consider the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience. The happiness of heaven, which is the reward promised in the gospel, is described to us by the sight and enjoyment of God. Now to render us capable of this blessed reward, it is necessary that we be like God; but nothing but

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 { “ the image of him who created us in righteousness” can make us like to God. For he that would be like God must be holy, and just, and good and patient, and merciful, as God is; and this alone can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God; for unless “we be like him, we cannot see him as he is,” and if we should be admitted into heaven, we could not find any pleasure and happiness in communion with him. “Blessed are the pure in heart (says our SAVIOUR) for they shall see God.” “Without holiness (says the apostle) no man shall see the LORD.” And indeed it is in the very nature of the thing impossible that a wicked man (whilst he remains so) should ever be happy, because there can be no agreeable and delightful society between those that are of a quite contrary temper and disposition to one another, between him “who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,” and a sinful and impure creature. For “what fellowship (saith the apostle) can righteousness have with unrighteousness? what communion hath light with darkness, or God with belial? that is, with the wicked and disobedient. ’Till we become like to God in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy society between him and us; we could neither delight ourselves in God, nor he take any pleasure in us; for “he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him. The wicked shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity.” It cannot be otherwise, but that there must be an eternal jarring and discord between the righteous and holy God, and wicked and unrighteous

unrighteous men. "I will behold thy face (says ^{SERM.} David) in righteousness." There is no looking ^{CXXIII.} God in the face, upon any other terms. If we have been "workers of iniquity," God will cast us out of his sight, and in great anger bid us to "depart from him;" and we also shall desire him to "depart from us," being unable to bear the sight of him.

So that there is great reason why holiness and obedience should be made the conditions of eternal life and happiness, since in the very nature of the thing it is so necessary a qualification for the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, who to us is the cause and fountain of happiness. I come in the

Fifth and last place, to shew that this method and means of our salvation is no prejudice to the law of faith, and to the free grace and mercy of God declared in the gospel. The gospel is called "the law of faith, and the law of grace," in opposition to the Jewish dispensation, which is called "the law, or covenant of works," because it consisteth so much in external rites and observances, which were but "types and shadows of good things to come," (as the apostle calls them in this epistle,) and which when they were come, that law did expire of itself, and was out of date, the obligation and observance of it was no longer necessary; but "a better covenant, which was established upon better promises," came in the place of it, and men were "justified by faith," that is, by sincerely embracing the christian religion, and were no longer under an obligation to that external, and servile, and imperfect dispensation, which consisted in circumcision, and in almost an endless number of external ceremonies,

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These are the works of the law so often spoken of by St. Paul, concerning which the Jews had not only an opinion of the necessity of them to a man's justification and salvation, but likewise of the merit of them; in opposition to both which opinions, St. Paul calls the covenant of the gospel, "the law of faith, and the law of grace."

But there is no where the least intimation given either by our SAVIOUR or his apostles, that obedience to the precepts of the gospel (which are in substance the moral law cleared and perfected) is not necessary to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life; but on the contrary, 'tis our SAVIOUR's express direction to the young man, who ask'd, "what good things he should do, that he might obtain eternal life; if thou wilt (says he) enter into life, keep the commandments;" and that he might understand what commandments he meant, he instanceth in the precepts of the moral law. And indeed, the whole tenor of our SAVIOUR's sermons, and the precepts and writings of the apostles are full and express to this purpose. "Not every one that saith unto me, LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my FATHER which is in heaven. Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine (that is these precepts which I have delivered) and doth them not, I will liken him to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. If ye know these things happy are ye, if ye do them. In every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness

is accepted of him. In J E S U S C H R I S T neither
circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumci-
sion; but faith, that is acted and inspired by cha-
rity." And that the apostle here means " that
charity or love," which is, " the fulfilling of the
law," is evident from what he says elsewhere ;
" that neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor
uncircumcision ; but the keeping of the command-
ments of G O D ;" in which text it is plain, that
the apostle speaks of the terms of our justification,
and what is available with G O D to that purpose.
And St. James to the same purpose, tells us, that
by the works of obedience " our faith is made
perfect," and that " faith without works is dead;"
and surely a dead faith will neither justify nor save
any man. St. John likewise very earnestly cautions
us to take heed of any such doctrine, as would take
away the necessity of righteousness and obedience;
" little children (says he) let no man deceive you,
" he that doth righteousness is righteous, as he is
" righteous." To all which I shall only add the
plain words of my text, " that C H R I S T became
" the author of eternal salvation to them that obey
" him."

So that no man hath reason to fear, that this
doctrine of the necessity of obedience to our accep-
tance with G O D, and the obtaining of eternal life,
should be any ways prejudicial to the law of faith,
and the law of grace. For so long as these three
things are but asserted and secured :

1st, That faith is the root and principle of obe-
dience and a holy life, and that " without it, it is
" impossible to please Gop."

2dly, That

2dly, That we stand continually in need of the divine grace and assistance to enable us to perform that obedience which the gospel requires of us, and is pleased to accept in order to eternal life. And,

3dly, That the forgiveness of our sins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of GOD, conferring these blessings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and satisfaction of the obedience and sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR and REDEEMER; I say, so long as we assert these three things, we give all that the gospel any where ascribes to faith, and to the grace of GOD revealed in the gospel.

I have been careful to express these things more fully and distinctly, that no man may imagine, that whilst we assert the necessity of obedience and a holy life, we have any design to derogate in the least from the faith and the grace of GOD; but only to engage and encourage men to holiness and a good life, by convincing them of the absolute and indispensable necessity of it, in order to eternal salvation. For all that I have said, is in plain english no more but this, that it is necessary for a man to be a good man, that he may get to heaven; and whoever finds fault with this doctrine, finds fault with the gospel itself, and the main end and design of the grace of GOD therein revealed to mankind, which offers salvation to men upon no other terms than these which I have mentioned; and to preach and press this doctrine, is certainly, if any thing in the world can be so, to pursue the great end and design of the christian religion, so plainly and expressly declared by St. Paul, Tit. ii, 11, 12. "The grace of GOD"

GOD that bringeth salvation, hath appear'd to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." And if the grace of GOD declared in the gospel have this effect upon us, then we may with confidence "wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great GOD, and our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works;" and then he adds, "these things teach and exhort, and rebuke with all authority;" that is, declare and inculcate this doctrine, and rebuke severely those who teach or practise contrary to it. And he repeats it again with a more vehement charge to Titus, to press upon men the necessity of obedience and good works, chap. iii. 8. "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in GOD, be careful to maintain good works."

All that now remains, is to make some useful inferences from what hath been said upon this argument, and so to conclude this discourse.

First of all, to convince us that an empty profession of the christian religion, how specious and glorious soever it be, if it be destitute of the fruits of obedience and a holy life, will by no means avail to bring us to heaven. No profession of faith in CHRIST, no subjection to him, tho' we be baptized in his name, and list our selves in the number of his disciples and followers, tho' we have made a constant profession of all the articles of the christian faith,

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faith, and have performed all the external parts and duties of religion, have gone constantly to church and frequented the service of GOD, and have joined in publick prayers to GOD with great appearance of devotion, and have heard his word with great reverence and attention, and received the blessed sacrament with all imaginable expressions of love and gratitude to our blessed REDEEMER; nay tho' we had heard our blessed SAVIOUR himself "teach in our streets, and had eaten and drunken in his presence;" yet if all this while "we have not done the will of GOD," and obeyed his laws, none of all these things will signify any thing to bring us to heaven, and make us partakers of that salvation, which he hath purchased for mankind.

But we cannot plead so much for our selves, as those did, of whom our SAVIOUR speaks. None of us shall be able to alledge for our selves at the great day, that "we had prophesied in his name, and in his name had cast out devils, and in his name had done many wonderful works;" and yet if we could alledge all this, it would do us no good. All that such can say for themselves is, that "they have call'd him LORD, LORD," that is, they have made profession of his religion, and been call'd by his name, that they have paid an outward honour and respect to him, and declared a mighty love and affection for him; but "they have not done his will, but have hated to be reformed, and have cast his commandments behind their backs" they have only born the leaves of an outward profession, but "have brought forth no fruit unto holiness," and therefore can have no reasonable expectation, that "their end should be everlasting life." So that when

When these men shall appear before the great and terrible judge of the world, they shall have nothing to say, but those vain words, "LORD, LORD:" to which our SAVIOUR will answer in that day, "why call ye me, LORD, LORD, when ye would not do the things which I said?" notwithstanding all your profession of faith in me, and objection to me, "ye have been workers of iniquity, therefore depart from me, I know ye not whence ye are."

Secondly, the consideration of what hath been said should stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of what the author of our salvation hath done for us; and there is great reason for thankfulness, whether we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, or the way and manner in which it was purchased, or the easy and reasonable terms upon which it may be obtain'd.

First, if we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, and that is salvation, "eternal salvation," which comprehends in it all the blessings and benefits of the gospel, both the means and the end, our happiness, and the way to it, by "saving us from our sins;" from the guilt of them, by our justification in the blood of CHRIST; and from the power and dominion of them, by the sanctifying grace and virtue of the HOLY GHOST.

And it comprehends the end, our deliverance from hell and the wrath to come, and the bestowing of happiness upon us, a great and lasting happiness, great as our wishes, and immortal as our souls; all this is comprehended in "eternal salvation."

2dly, If we consider the way and manner in which this great benefit was purchased and procured for us; in a way of infinite kindness and condescension, in the lowest humiliation, and the unparalleled sufferings of the SON of GOD; for “never was there any sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the LORD afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger;” in his “taking upon him the form of a servant;” and the person of a sinner, and his becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross,” which was the punishment of the vile slaves, and the most heinous malefactors. The SON of GOD came down from heaven, from the highest pitch of glory and happiness, into this lower world, this “vale of tears,” and sink of sin and sorrow, and was contented himself to suffer, to save us from eternal ruin; to be the most despicable, and the most miserable man that ever was, that he might raise us to glory and honour, and advance us to a state of the greatest happiness that humane nature is capable of.

3dly, If we consider the easy and reasonable terms upon which we may be made partakers of this unspeakable benefit, and that is by a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the laws of GOD, which supposeth repentance towards GOD, and faith in our LORD JESUS CHRIST, as the root and principle of all the virtues of a good life; that is, by doing that which best becomes us, and which is most agreeable to the original frame of our nature, and to the dictates of our reason, and which setting aside the consideration of our reward, is really best for our present benefit and advantage, our comfort and happiness, even in this world; for GOD, in giving

giving laws to us, hath imposed nothing upon us, but what in all reason ought to have been our choice, if he had not imposed it; nothing but what is for our good, and is in its own nature necessary to make us capable of that happiness which he hath promised to us. And what can be more gracious, than to make one benefit the condition of a greater? than to promise to make us happy for ever, if we will but do that which upon all accounts is really best and most for our advantage in this present life?

Thirdly, here is abundant encouragement given to our obedience; we have the divine assistance promised to us, to enable us to the performance of the most difficult parts of our duty; we have the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD to help our infirmities, to excite us to that which is good, and to help and strengthen us in the doing of it.

For our further encouragement we are assured of the divine acceptance in case of our sincere obedience, notwithstanding the manifold failings and imperfections of it, for the sake of the perfect righteousness and obedience, and the meritorious sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR: and tho' "when we have done all we can do, we are unprofitable servants," and have done nothing but what was our duty, yet GOD is pleased to accept what we can do, because it is sincere, and to forgive the defects and imperfections of our obedience, for his sake, who "fulfilled all righteousness."

And besides all this, we have the encouragement of a great and everlasting reward, infinitely beyond all proportion of any service and obedience that we can perform. And if GOD be ready to assist and strengthen us in the doing of our duty, and be willing

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so graciously to accept and to reward at such a rate the sincerity of our endeavours to please him, notwithstanding all the failings and imperfections of our best service and obedience; what can we possibly desire more for our encouragement, to “patient continuance in well-doing,” and to be “steadfast and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the LORD?”

Fourthly and lastly, the consideration of what hath been said upon this argument may serve severely to rebuke the groundless presumption of those, who rely with so much confidence upon CHRIST for eternal salvation, without any conscience or care to keep his commandments; as if salvation lay upon his hands, and he knew not how to dispose of it, and were glad of any one that would come and take it off upon any terms. No, “he came to save us from our sins, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”

So that the salvation which he hath purchased for us, doth necessarily imply our forsaking of our sins, and returning to GOD and our duty; and his death and sufferings are not more an argument of his great love to mankind, than they are a demonstration of his perfect hatred of sin. So that if we continue in the love and practice of sin, we defeat the whole design of his coming into the world, and of all that he hath done and suffered for us; and the redemption which CHRIST hath wrought for us will not avail us in the least. “Salvation is far from the wicked,” (says David, Psal. cxix. 155.) If we have been “workers of iniquity,” the SAVIOUR of the world when he comes to judge it, will bid us “to depart from him.”

From

From all that hath been said, it is evident, that it is the greatest presumption in the world for any man to hope to obtain eternal salvation by any device whatsoever, or in the communion of any church whatsoever, without obedience and a holy life. For tho' our obedience cannot merit; yet it is necessary to qualify and dispose us for it: tho' it does not make us strictly worthy; yet it makes us "meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

S E R M O N CXXIV.

The authority of JESUS CHRIST, with the commission and promise which he gave to his apostles.

M A T T H. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

And JESUS came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

THESE words are the last that our blessed SER M.
SAVIOUR spake to his apostles, immediate-CXXIV.
ly before his ascension into heaven; and
there are these three things contained in them.

I. A

I. A declaration of his own authority ; “ all power is given unto me both in heaven and in earth.”

II. A commission to his disciples grounded upon that authority ; “ go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

III. A promise to encourage them in this work ; “ and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

I. Here's our SAVIOUR's declaration of his own authority ; “ all power is given unto me in heaven and earth.” Here's an unlimited power and authority given him over all creatures in heaven and earth. This the scripture tells us was conferred upon him, as a reward of his sufferings, Philip. ii. 8, 9, 10. “ He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name ; that at the name of JESUS every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ;” that is, that all creatures, angels, and men, and devils, should do homage, and acknowledge subjection to him.

II. Here is the commission he gave to his apostles, by virtue of this authority ; “ go ye therefore and teach all nations.” The commission which he here gives, is founded in the authority he had before received. Having all power committed to him, he constitutes and appoints the apostles and their successors to manage the affairs of this his spiritual

ritual kingdom upon earth; and this seems to be the same commission which St. John mentions in other words, John xx. 21. "As my FATHER hath sent me, even so send I you;" that is, as my FATHER commission'd me before, so now having received full authority from him, I commission you.

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Now in this commission, which our SAVIOUR gave to his disciples, I shall take notice,

First, of the general import and design of it.

Secondly, a more particular declaration how they were to manage this design.

First, the general import and design of this commission; "go ye and teach all nations." The word which we translate teach, is μαθητεύσατε, disciple all nations, endeavour to make all the world christians. One would think here was a power plainly enough given them, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. Which will more fully appear, if we compare this passage in St. Matthew with the other evangelists. St. Mark, chap. xvi. 15. hath it; "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." From which text I suppose St. Francis thought himself bound to preach to beasts and birds, and accordingly did it very often, and with wonderful success as they tell us in the legend of his life. But to extend our SAVIOUR's commission so far, is want of common sense; in which St. Francis (tho' they tell us he had other gifts and graces to an eminent degree) was plainly defective.

But to proceed, St. Luke chap. xxiv. 47. tells us, our SAVIOUR commanded, that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." So that

SER M. that their commission did plainly extend to the Gen-
 CXXIV. tiles as well as to the Jews; only they were to be-
 gin with the Jews, and to preach the gospel first to
 them, and when they had gone over Judea and Sa-
 maria, then to pass to other nations, as St. Luke
 doth most expressly declare, Acts i. 8. "Ye shall re-
 "ceive power, after that the HOLY GHOST is
 "come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto
 "me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and
 "in Samaria, unto the uttermost parts of the
 "earth."

But see the strange power of prejudice, to blind
 the eyes even of good men, in the plainest matters.
 The disciples of our SAVIOUR, for all they had en-
 tertained a new religion, yet they retained the old
 pride and prejudice of their nation, against the rest
 of the world; as if none but themselves had any
 share in the favour of GOD, or were to have any part
 in the salvation of the MESSIAS.

Our SAVIOUR did so far consider this preju-
 dice of theirs, that he never in his life-time acquain-
 ted them with this matter, so as to make them
 fully to understand it, because they were not able
 to bear it. And it is very probable, that this is one
 of those things which our SAVIOUR meant, John
 xvi. 12, 13. "I have yet many things to say unto
 "you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit
 "when the SPIRIT of truth is come, he will
 "guide you into all truth." That is, he should lead
 them into the knowledge of those truths, of which
 they were not then capable. And tho' our SAVI-
 OUR, after his resurrection, seems to have declared
 this sufficiently to them; yet by their practice after
 his ascension, it appears that they understood all

this

this only of the Jews, namely that they were to preach the gospel first to the Jews that were at Jerusalem, and in Judea, and then to those that were dispersed in other nations; for 'tis clear from the history of their first preaching, recorded in the Acts, that they preached to none but to the Jews, and the proselytes of the jewish religion. So strong was their prejudice, that they had not the least suspicion that this blessing of the gospel was intended for the heathen world; nor were they convinced to the contrary 'till St. Peter had a special vision and revelation to this purpose, and the HOLY GHOST came upon the Gentiles in miraculous gifts, as he had done before upon the Jews that were converted to christianity. And thus the SPIRIT OF GOD "led them into this truth," and then they understood this command of our SAVIOUR's in a larger sense. And to this St. Peter plainly refers, Acts x. 42. where he tells us, how that CHRIST after his resurrection appeared to them, and "commanded them to preach unto the people." So likewise do Paul and Barnabas, Acts xiii. 46. where they speak thus to the Jews, "it was necessary that the word should first be preached to you, but seeing you put it from you, lo we turn to the Gentiles, for so hath the LORD commanded us." Now he no where commanded this, but in this commission, which he gave them before his ascension.

Secondly, you have here a particular declaration how they were to manage this work of making disciples to the christian religion.

1. By baptizing them into the christian faith.
2. By instructing them in the precepts and practices of a christian life.

1. By baptizing them into the christian faith which is here called "baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST." Baptism is a solemn rite appointed by our SAVIOUR for the initiating persons into the christian religion: but it was a ceremony in use before, both among the Jews and Gentiles. The heathens observed it at the initiating persons into their religious mysteries; and the Jews, when they admitted proselytes to their religion; at which time the males (as Maimonides tells us) were both circumcised and baptized, the women were only baptized. One circumstance of the baptism of grown persons was, that standing in the water up to the neck, they received several precepts of the law. And as the jewish writers further tell us, this ceremony did not only belong to them that were of grown years, but to the children of the proselytes, if it were desired, upon condition, that when they came to years they should continue in that religion.

Now tho' this was a religious ceremony used both by Jews and Gentiles, and without any divine institution, that we know of, our blessed SAVIOUR (who in none of his institutions seems to have favoured unnecessary innovations) was so far from the superstition of declining it upon this account, that it had been in religious use both among Jews and Gentiles, that he seems the rather to have chosen it for that very reason. For seeing it was a common rite of all religions, and in it self very significant of that purity which is the great design of all religions, it was the more likely to find the easier acceptance, and to be most suitable to the

which

which he intended to be the universal religion of the world.

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As for the form of baptism, "in the name of the FATHER, of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST," it plainly refers to that short creed, or profession of faith, which was required of those that were to be baptized, answerably to the reciting of the precepts of the law, at the baptizing of proselytes among the Jews; now the articles of this creed were reduced to these three heads, "of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST," and contains what was necessary to be believed concerning each of these. And this probably is that which the apostle calls the doctrine of baptism, Heb. vi. 2. viz. a short summary of the christian faith, the profession whereof was to be made at baptism; of which the most ancient fathers make so frequent mention, calling it "the rule of faith." It was a great while indeed before christians tied themselves strictly to that very form of words, which we now call the apostles creed, but the sense was the same, tho' every one express it in his own words; nay the same father reciting it upon several occasions, does not confine himself to the very same expressions: a plain indication that they were not then strictly bound up to any form of words, but retaining the sense and substance of the articles, every one express them as he pleased. So that "to baptize in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of HOLY GHOST," is to perform this rite or sacrament by the authority of, and with special relation to the three persons of the blessed trinity, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, as the chief objects of the christian faith, whereof solemn pro-

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feſſion was then made. So that upon this form of baptism appointed by our SAVIOUR, compared with what is elſewhere ſaid in ſcripture, concerning the divinity of the SON, and the HOLY GHOST is principally founded the doctrine of the bleſſed trinity, I mean in that ſimplicity in which the ſcripture hath delivered it, and not as it hath been ſince confounded and entangled in the cobwebs and niceties of the ſchools. The ſcripture indeed no where calls them perſons, but ſpeaks of them as we do of ſeveral perſons, and therefore that word is not unfitly uſed to expreſs the difference between them, or at leaſt we do not know a fitter word for that purpoſe.

By “ baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST,” is meant the initiating of men by this ſolemn rite and ceremony into the chriſtian religion, upon their profeſſion of the neceſſary doctrines of it concerning the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, and a ſolemn ſtipulation and engagement to live according to thoſe doctrines: which promiſe of a ſuitable life and practice was likewise made at the ſame time, as Juſtin Martyr and other of the ancient fathers do teſtify.

But before I leave this head, it is very fit to take particular notice what uſe the anabaptiſts make of this text, ſo as in effect to lay the whole ſtreſs of their cauſe upon it; as if by virtue of this command of our SAVIOUR’s, and the manner wherein it is expreſſ’d, all infants, even thoſe of chriſtian parents who are themſelves already admitted into the new covenant of the goſpe, were excluded from baptism, becauſe it is here ſaid by our SAVIOUR,

“ go

go ye, and disciple all nations, baptizing them;" SERM.
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from whence they infer, (and very clearly and strongly as they think) that none are to be baptized, but such as are first thoroughly instructed in the christian religion, and made disciples, which infants are not, but only those who are grown to some maturity of years and understanding: but the opinion and practice of the ancient church in this matter, is a sufficient bar to this inference, at least to the clearness of it. And indeed it cannot reasonably be imagined, that the apostles, who had all of them been bred up in the jewish religion, which constantly, and by virtue of a divine precept and institution, admitted infants into that church, and to the benefits of that covenant, by the rite of circumcision, and likewise the infants of proselytes by baptism, (as I observed before) I say no man can reasonably imagine, that the apostles could understand our SAVIOUR, as intending by any consequence from this text, to exclude the children of christians out of the christian church, and to debar them of the benefits of the new covenant of the gospel: the children of christians being every whit as capable of being taken into this new covenant; and of partaking of the benefits of it, as children of the Jews were of being admitted into the old. Unless we will suppose (which at first sight seems very harsh and unreasonable) that by the terms of the christian religion, children are in a much worse condition, than the children of the Jews were under the law. So that the parity of reason being so plain, nothing less than an express prohibition from our SAVIOUR, and an exception of children from baptism, can be thought, sufficient to deprive the children of christians

ftians of any privilege, of which the jewifh were capable. For the plain meaning of this commiffion to the apoftles is, to go and “ profelyte all nations “ to the chriitian religion,” and to admit them fo- lemnly into it by baptifm, as the Jews were wont to profelyte men to their religion by circumcifion and baptifm; by which rites alfo they took in the children of the profelytes, upon promife that when they came to years they fhould continue in that religion. And if this was our SAVIOUR’S meaning, the apoftles had no reason from the tenor of their commiffion, to underftand that the children of chri- tian profelytes were any more excluded, than the children of profelytes to the jewifh religion, un- lefs our SAVIOUR had exprefly excepted them; for it is a favourable cafe, and in a matter of privilege, and therefore ought not to be determined to debar children of it, upon any obfcure confequence from a text, which it is certain was never fo underftood by the chriitian church, for 1500 years together. I have done with the firft part of their commiffion, which was to difciple or profelyte all nations to the chriitian religion, and to admit them into the chri- tian church, by the rite or facrament of baptifm. I proceed to confider the

Second part of their commiffion, which was to inftruct men in the precepts and duties of a chri- tian life, “ teaching them to obferve all things “ whatfoever I have commanded you.” You fee how their commiffion bounds and limits them, they were to teach others thofe precepts which CHRIST had taught and deliver’d to them; they had no power by virtue of this commiffion to make new laws, which fhould be of univerfal and perpetual obli-
gation,

gation, and consequently necessary to the salvation of all christians; they were only to be the publishers, but not the authors of this new religion. And therefore St. Paul, when the Corinthians consulted him about several things relating to marriage and virginity, he only gives his advice, but would not take upon him to make a law in those cases that should be binding to all christians. And for the same reason christians do generally at this day, think themselves absolved from the obligation of that canon, which was made even in a council of the apostles, as to all those branches of it, the reason whereof is now ceased. But notwithstanding this, the authority which our SAVIOUR conferred upon his apostles to teach his doctrine, does in the nature of it necessarily imply a power of governing the societies of christians, under such officers, and by such rules, as are most suitable to the nature of such a society, and most fit to promote the great ends of the christian religion: for without this power of governing, they cannot be suppos'd to be endowed with sufficient authority to teach; and therefore in pursuance of this commission, we find that the apostles did govern the societies of christians by such rules and constitutions, as were fitted to the present circumstances of christianity. And as they did appoint temporary officers upon emergent occasions, so they constituted others that were of perpetual use in the church, for the instructing and governing of christians, and that in such a subordination to one another, as would be most effectual to the attaining of the end of government; which subordination of governors, hath not only been used in all religions, but in all the well-regulated civil societies

2124. *The authority of JESUS CHRIST, with his*
SERM. ties that ever were in the world. And this ma
CXXIV. suffice to have spoken of the second part of the
commission.

The third and last thing in the text, is the promise which our SAVIOUR here makes for the encouragement of the apostles in this work; "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" that is, tho' I be going from you in person, yet I will still be present with you by my power and SPIRIT. And surely this must needs be a great encouragement to have him engaged for their assistance, "who had all power in heaven and earth committed to him," as he tells them at the 18th verse.

I shall endeavour therefore, as far as the time will permit, to explain to you the true meaning and extent of this promise. That it is primarily made to the apostles, no man can doubt, that considers that it was spoken to them immediately by our SAVIOUR and in regard to them, the meaning of it is plainly this, that our SAVIOUR would send down the HOLY GHOST upon them, in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the more speedy planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them, and assist them extraordinarily in this work.

And that this is the primary meaning of it, in regard to the apostles, will be very plain, by considering how this promise is express'd by the other evangelists; Mark xvi. 17. instead of this promise, you have these words, immediately after our SAVIOUR had given them commission to go and preach the gospel, "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized

“baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth
“not, shall be damned.” And then it follows,
“these signs shall follow them that believe; in
“my name they shall cast out devils, and shall
“speak with new tongues.” And Luke xxiv. 49.
instead of “lo, I am with you,” it is said, “be-
“hold, I send the promise of my FATHER upon
“you,” that is, the miraculous gifts of the HOLY
GHOST; for it follows in the next words, “but
“tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be
“endowed with power from on high.” This St.
Luke himself interprets of the promise of the
HOLY GHOST, Acts i. 4, 5. “He commanded
“them that they should not depart from Jerusalem,
“but wait for the promise of the FATHER, which,
“saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly
“baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized
“with the HOLY GHOST, not many days hence.”
And ver. 8. “Ye shall receive power after that the
“HOLY GHOST is come upon you, and ye
“shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem,
“and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the ut-
“termost part of the earth.” So that no man that
compares these texts together, can doubt, but that
this was the primary meaning of this promise, as it
was made to the apostles.

But then it is as plain likewise, that this promise
is to be extended farther than to the persons of the
apostles, even to all those that should afterwards suc-
ceed them in this work of preaching the gospel,
and baptizing, because our SAVIOUR adds, that
“he would be with them to the end of the world;”
which words, because they reach far beyond the
apostles times, (as I shall shew by and by) must be

SER M. necessarily extended to such persons in after-ages, and
CXXIV. should carry on the same work.

There are two famous controversies about the sense of these words, in which this promise is expressed.

The first is, concerning the circumstance of time mentioned in this promise, “always, to the end of the world.”

The other concerning the substance of the promise itself, what is meant by our SAVIOUR’S “being with them.” In the first we have to deal with the enthusiasts, in the latter with the papists. I shall examine the pretences of both these, as briefly and plainly as I can.

First, concerning the circumstance of time expressed in these words, “always, to the end of the world.” The enthusiasts would persuade us, that the meaning of these phrases is not to be extended beyond that age, and that this promise is to be limited to the apostle persons, and that the sense of it is, that CHRIST would be with the apostles, *πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας*, all their days so long as they should live, and that would be, *ἕως τῆ συντελείας τῆ αἰῶν*, to the end of that age; thus they translate it, and with no worse design than to take away the necessity of a gospel ministry.

But this pretence will vanish, if we can make good these two things.

1. That the letter of this promise extends farther than the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of that age.

2. However that be, it is certain that the reason of it extends to all that should succeed them in the ministry, to the end of the world.

1. The letter of this promise extends farther than SERM.
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the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of
that age. I will easily grant that the phrase *πάσας
τὰς ἡμέρας* signifies only continually; “I will be
“with you continually;” but then the other phrase,
ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, until the end of the
world, is several times in scripture undeniably used
for the end and dissolution of all things, and can-
not with any probability be shewn to be ever used
otherwise. In this sense it is unquestionably used
three times, Matth. xiii. “The harvest is the end
“of the world.” Ver. 39. “So shall it be at the
“end of the world.” Ver. 40. and ver. 59. it is
said, that at “the end of the world, the angels shall
“come forth, and sever the wicked from the just,
“and cast them into the furnace;” which must ei-
ther be understood of the end of the world, and of
the day of judgment, or there will be no clear text
in the whole bible to that purpose; and it is very
probable, that this phrase is used in the same sense,
Matth. xxiv. 3. where the disciples ask our SAVIOUR,
“what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the
“end of the world?” as will appear to any one
that considers our SAVIOUR’s answer to this que-
stion; the latter part whereof cannot, without
too much violence, be accommodated to any thing
but the final dissolution of the world. Now if this
phrase be every where else in scripture used in this
sense, there is no reason why it should be taken other-
wise in the text, only to serve the purpose of an un-
reasonable opinion.

I know there are phrases very near a-kin to this,
which are used in a quite different sense, namely, for
the expiration of the Jewish state, and that we may

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know how to distinguish them, it is observable, that when the scripture speaks of the end of the world, it is called συντέλεια τῆ αἰῶν, the end of the age, in the singular number; but when it speaks of the times before the gospel, it always expresseth them in the plural; the reason of which is, that famous tradition among the Jews, of the house of Elias, which distributed the whole duration of the world into three ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the MESSIAS; and this last age they looked on with great difference from the rest, as the famous and glorious age, which was to be as it were the beginning of a new world: and therefore the Jews in their writings constantly call it the *saeculum futurum*, the age, or the world to come: and therefore the apostle in this epistle to the Hebrews, calls the state of the gospel by that name, as best known to them, Heb. ii. 5. "But unto the angels" hath he not put in subjection the world to come, "whereof we now speak;" that is, the law was given by the disposition of angels; but the dispensation of the gospel, which is call'd the world to come, was managed and administered by the Son of God. So likewise Heb. vi. 5. those miraculous powers which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel, are call'd δυνάμεις τῆ μέλλοντος αἰῶν, "the powers of the world to come," that is, of the gospel-age.

So that this last age of the gospel, is that which the scripture by way of eminency calls "the age;" those that went before are constantly called αἰῶνες, the ages in the plural number. So we find, Eph. iii. 9. the gospel is called "the dispensation of the" "mystery that was hid in God," ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων, "from

from ages ;” and you have the same phrase, Col. 26. Upon the same account, the expiration of the Jewish state, is in scripture called “ the last times, and the last days,” Heb. i. 2. “ But in the last days, God hath spoken to us by his Son.” 1 Cor. ii. 11. “ These things are written for our admonition, upon whom τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, the ends of the ages are come.” In the same sense the apostle, Heb. ix. 26. speaking of CHRIST, says, that “ he appeared, ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, at the end of the ages,” to take away sin; that is, at the conclusion of the ages which had gone before, in the last age. So that if we will be governed in the interpretation of this text, by the constant use of this phrase in scripture, the letter of this promise will extend to the end of the world.

2. But however this be, it is certain that the reason of this promise does extend to all those that should succeed the apostles in their ministry to the end of the world; I will suppose now (to give the adversaries their utmost scope) that which we have no reason to grant, that the letter of this promise reacheth only to the apostles and their age, and that our SAVIOUR’S meaning was no more but this, that he would send down the HOLY GHOST upon them in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the speedy planting and propagating the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them ’till this work was done. Now supposing there were nothing more than this intended in the letter of it, this ought not much to trouble us, so long as it is certain, that the reason of it does extend to the successors of the apostles in all ages of the world. I do not mean, that the reason of this promise does
give

give us sufficient assurance, that GOD will assist the teachers and governors of his church in all ages, in the same extraordinary manner as he did the apostles, because there is not the like reason and necessity for it; but that we have sufficient assurance from the reason of this promise, that GOD will not be wanting to us, in such fitting and necessary assistance as the state of religion, and the welfare of it in every age shall require: for can we imagine that GOD would use such extraordinary means to plant a religion in the world, and take no care of it afterwards? that he who had begun so good a work, in great and glorious a design, would let it fall to the ground for want of any thing that was necessary to the support of it?

This is reasonable in itself; but we are not allowed without good ground for thus extending the general reason of particular promises beyond the letter of them. The apostle hath gone before us in this, for Heb. xiii. 5, 6. he there extends two particular promises of the old testament to all christians, "let your conversation (says he) be without covetousness" and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. And again, "the LORD is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me." These promises were made to particular persons; the first of them to Joshua, and the other to David; but yet the apostle applies them to all christians, and to good men in all ages, because the general ground and reason of them extended so far. He who gave Joshua and David this encouragement to their duty, will certainly be as good to us, if we do ours.

And thus I have done with the first controversy about the sense of these words, which concerns the circumstances of time mentioned in this promise, "always, to the end of the world," and have plainly shewn, that both the letter and the reason of this promise does extend farther than the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of that age, even to all that should succeed them in their ministry to the end of the world. I come now to consider,

Secondly, the substance of the promise itself, namely, what is meant by our SAVIOUR's "being with them." And here our adversaries of the church of Rome would fain persuade us, that this promise is made to the church of Rome, and that the meaning of it is, that that church should always be infallible, and never err in the faith. But as there is no mention of the church of Rome in this promise, nor any where else in scripture upon the like occasion, whereby we might be directed to understand this promise to be made to that church; so to any unprejudiced person the plain and obvious sense of this promise can be no other than this, that our SAVIOUR having commissioned the apostles to go and preach the christian religion in the world, he promises to assist them in this work, and those that should succeed them in it, "to the end of the world." But how any man can construe this promise, so as to make it signify the perpetual infallibility of the Roman church, I cannot for my life devise, and yet this is one of the main texts upon which they build that old and tottering fabrick of their infallibility.

Here is a general promise of assistance to the pastors and governors of the church, in all ages to the end
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SERM. of the world; but that this assistance shall always
 CX XIV. be to the degree of infallibility, (as it was to the
 apostles) can neither be concluded from the letter of
 this promise, nor from the reason of it; much less
 can it be from hence concluded, that the assistance
 here promised, if it were to the degree of infallibi-
 lity, is to be limited and confined to the supreme
 pastor and governor of the Roman church.

That the assistance here promised shall always be
 to the degree of infallibility, can by no means be
 concluded from the letter of this promise. Indeed
 there is no pretence or colour for it; he must have
 very peculiar sagacity; that can find out in these
 words, "I am with you always," a promise of in-
 fallible assistance. Is not the promise which God
 made to Joshua, and which the apostle to the He-
 brews applies to all christians, and to all good men
 in all ages, "I will never leave thee nor forsake
 thee," the very same in sense with this, "I will
 be with you always?" and yet surely, no man
 did ever imagine, that by virtue of this promise
 every christian, and every good man is infallible.

But neither can it be inferr'd from the reason of
 this promise, that this assistance shall always be to
 the degree of infallibility. It was so indeed to the
 apostles; the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST
 which were bestowed upon them for the more speed
 and effectual planting and propagating of the gospel
 in the world, were a divine testimony and confirmation
 to the doctrine which they delivered; and having this
 divine testimony given to them, we are certain that
 they were secured from error in the delivery of that
 doctrine. So that the apostles had no other infallibility
 but what depended upon, and was evidenced by the
 miraculous gifts wherewith they were endowed; and
 therefore

therefore without the like gifts, none can with reason pretend to the like infallibility: for infallibility signifies an extraordinary assistance of God's SPIRIT, whereby those who are thus assisted are secured from error. This every confident man may, if he pleaseth, pretend to; but no man is to be believed to have it, but he who can give such evidence of it, as is fit to satisfy reasonable men, that he hath it. Now the only sufficient evidence of such an extraordinary divine assistance is the power of miracles. This indeed is the great external testimony of a teacher come from God, "if he do such works as none can do, except God be with him;" and this evidence the prophets of old, and our SAVIOUR, and his apostles, always gave of their infallibility. And if the pope and general councils can give the testimony of such miracles for their infallibility, as Moses, and our SAVIOUR, and his apostles did work, we are ready to acknowledge it. Such a testimony as this would give the world a thousand times more satisfaction concerning their infallibility, than all the subtle arguments of Bellarmine, and all their writers. But if they cannot, they may dispute about it to the end of the world; and every man that hath but the same confidence may pretend to it with as much reason as they do.

But to proceed in my argument, here is a plain reason why this extraordinary assistance should be granted to the apostles at first; and another reason as plain, why it should not be continued afterwards. It was reasonable, and in some degree necessary, that the apostles should be thus assisted at the first publication of the gospel, namely to give satisfaction to the world, that they were faithful and true witnesses

of the doctrine and miracles of CHRIST. But since this doctrine and these miracles are recorded to posterity, by those very persons that were the assisted, here is as plain a reason, why after the gospel was planted and establish'd in the world this infallibility should cease. So long as we have an infallible foundation of faith, namely, the divine revelation consign'd in writing, and transmitte down to us by testimony of undoubted credit, what need is there now of a fixt and standing infallibility in the church? but having handled this argument more at large elsewhere, I shall insist no further upon it here.

I have now done with the three things I propounded to discourse upon from this text. You have heard what authority our SAVIOUR had given him; what commission he gave to his disciples and what assistance he hath promised to the pastors and governors of his church to the end of the world: namely, such an assistance as is suitable to the exigencies of the church, in the several ages and states of christianity; which assistance was at first very extraordinary and miraculous. GOD was pleas'd to give witness to the first teachers and publishers of the gospel, "with signs and wonders" and divers miracles, and gifts of the HOLY "GHOST;" and this at first was in a very great degree necessary, it not being otherwise imaginable how christianity could have born up against all the force and violent opposition which was rais'd against it: but this extraordinary assistance was but a temporary and transient dispensation. GOD did, as it were pass by "in the strong and mighty wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire:" but he was in the

" still

still voice," that is, he designed to settle and continue that dispensation, in that more calm and secret way of assistance, which offers less violence to the nature of man, but which was intended for the constant and permanent dispensation. So that we have no reason to think, that GOD hath now forsaken his church, though he be not with it in so sensible and extraordinary a manner.

But then if any particular church desire and expect this blessed presence and assistance of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, we must remember, that there is a condition to be performed on our parts. For how absolute soever this promise may be, in respect of the church universal; it is certainly conditional to any particular church, as sad experience in many instances hath shewn. GOD hath long since left the church of Jerusalem, where the gospel was first published; he hath left the church of Antioch, where the believers of the gospel were first call'd christians; he hath left the famous churches of Asia, to that degree of desolation, that the ruins and places of some of them are hardly at this day certainly known. And this may also be the fate of any particular church, not excepting Rome her self, for all her pride and confidence to the contrary. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of GOD: towards them that fell, severity; but towards us goodness, if we continue in his goodness, otherwise we also shall be cut off."

This, as I observed before, is spoken particularly to the Roman church; the apostle supposeth that the church of Rome her self may be guilty of apostasy from the faith, and cut off by unbelief, and indeed seems to foretel it; which how it consists with

SER M. their confident pretence to infallibility, let them look
CXXIV. to it.

And let all particular churches look to themselves that they do not forfeit this promise of divine assistance. For CHRIST hath not so tied himself to any particular church, but that if they forsake him, he may leave them, and “remove his candlestick from them.” There have been many sad instances of this, since the first planting of christianity and we have no small reason to apprehend that it may come to be our own case; for certainly we have many of those marks of ruin among us, which did foretel the destruction of the Jewish church and nation; horrible profaneness and contempt of religion, division and animosities to the highest degree, and an universal dissoluteness and corruption of manners. And why should we, who do the same things, think our selves exempted from the same fate? what can we expect, but that God should deal with us as he did with them, “take away the kingdom of GOD from us, and give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it?”

The condition of this great promise here in the text, to the pastors and governors of the christian church, is the faithful execution of their commission; if they do sincerely endeavour to gain men to the belief and practice of christianity, CHRIST hath promised to be with them. The performance of this condition doth primarily concern the chief governors of the church, and next to them the ministers of the gospel in general, that they should be diligent and faithful in their respective stations, “teaching men to observe all things whatsoever CHRIST hath commanded.” And if we would make this

our great work, to instruct our respective charges in the necessary doctrines of faith, and the indispensable duties of a good life, we should have far less trouble with them about other matters. And that we may do this work effectually, we must be serious in our instructions and exemplary in our lives. "Serious in our instructions;" this certainly the apostle requires in the highest degree, when he chargeth ministers, "so to speak, as the oracles of God," to which nothing can be more contrary, than to trifle with the word of God, and to speak of the weightiest matters in the world, the great and everlasting concerns of the souls of men, in so slight and indecent a manner, as is not only beneath the gravity of the pulpit, but even of a well-regulated stage. Can any thing be more unsuitable, than to hear a minister of God from this solemn place to break jests upon sin, and to quibble upon the vices of the age? this is to shoot without a bullet, as if we had no mind to do execution, but only to make men smile at the mention of their faults; this is so nauseous a folly, and of so pernicious consequence to religion, that hardly any thing too severe can be said of it.

And then if we would have our instructions effectual, we must be "exemplary in our lives." Aristotle tells, that the manners of the speaker have *κυριότητα πείν*, the most sovereign power of persuasion. And therefore Cato puts it into the definition of an orator, that he is, *vir bonus, dicendi peritus*, "a good man, and an eloquent speaker." This is true as to all kinds of persuasion; the good opinion which men have of the speaker, gives great weight to his words, and does strangely dispose the minds of men to entertain his counsels. But the reputation

reputation of goodness is more especially necessary and useful to those whose proper work it is to persuade men to be good; and therefore the apostle, when he had charged Titus to put men in mind of their duty, immediately adds, "in all things shewing thy self a pattern of good works." None so fit to teach others their duty, and none so likely to gain men to it, as those who practise it themselves; because hereby we convince men that we are in earnest, when they see that we persuade them to nothing, but what we choose to do our selves. This is the way to "stop the mouths of men," and to confute their malice, by an exemplary piety and virtue. So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. ii. 15. "For so is the will of GOD, that by well-doing ye put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

S E R M O N CXXV.

The difficulties of a christian life
consider'd.

L U K E xiii. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

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THERE are two great mistakes about the nature of religion, equally false, and equally pernicious to the souls of men: and the devil, whose great design it is to keep men off from religion

religion by any means, makes use of both these mistakes, to serve his own purpose and design upon the several tempers of men. Those who are melancholy and serious, he disheartens and discourageth from attempting it, by the extreme trouble and difficulty of it, representing it in so horrid and frightful a shape, incumber'd with such difficulties, and attended with such troubles and sufferings, as are insuperable, and intolerable to humane nature; whereby he persuades men, that they had better never attempt it, since they may despair to go through with it.

On the other hand, those who are sanguine and full of hopes, he possesses with a quite contrary apprehension; that the business of religion is so short and easy a work, that it may be done at any time, and if need be, at the last moment of our lives, tho' it is not so well to put it upon the last hazard; and by this means, a great part of mankind are lull'd in security, and adjourn the business of religion from time to time; and because it is so easy, and so much in their power, they satisfy themselves with an indeterminate resolution to set about that business some time or other before they die, and so to repent, and make their peace with GOD once for all.

These pretences contradict one another, and therefore cannot be both true, but they may both be false, as indeed they are, and truth lies between them; religion being neither so slight and easy a work as some would have it, nor so extremely difficult and intolerable, as others would represent it. To confute the false apprehensions which some have of the easiness of it, our SAVIOUR tells us there must

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must be some striving; and to satisfy us, that the difficulties of religion are not so great and insuperable, as some would make them, our SAVIOUR tells us, that those who "strive" shall succeed and "enter in;" but those who only "seek," that is, do not vigorously set about the business of religion, but only make some faint attempts to get to heaven, "shall not be able to enter in." "Strive" to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, but shall not be able."

The occasion of which words of our blessed SAVIOUR, was a question, that was put to him, by one of his disciples, concerning the number of those that should be saved, ver. 23. One said unto him "LORD, are there few that be saved?" To which curious question, our SAVIOUR (according to his manner, when such kind of questions were put to him) does not give a direct answer, because it was neither necessary, nor useful for his hearers to be resolved in, it did not concern them, to know what number of persons should be saved, but what course they should take that they might be of that number; and therefore, instead of satisfying their curiosities, he puts them upon their duty; admonishing them, instead of concerning themselves what should become of others, to take care of themselves. "And he said unto them, strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." He does not say, that "but few shall be saved;" (as some have presumptuously ventur'd to determine) but only few in comparison of those "many, that shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

In these words we may consider these two things. First, the duty enjoined, "strive to enter in at the strait gate."

Secondly, the reason or argument to enforce it, "for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

First, the duty enjoined; "strive to enter in at the strait gate." Which words being metaphorical, I shall strip them of the metaphor, that so we may see the plain meaning of them. Now by this metaphor, or rather allegory, these three things are plainly intended.

1st, the course of a holy and christian life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness, is here represented to us by a way, which every man, that would come to heaven, must walk in. For so St. Matthew (who expresseth this more fully) makes mention of a way, as well as a gate, by which we must enter into it; "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life." And this, tho' it be not express'd by St. Luke, is necessarily understood, "strive to enter in by the strait gate," that is, into the way that leads to life.

2dly, the first difficulties of a holy and religious course of life, are here represented to us, "by a strait gate." For the gate at which we enter, and the way in which we walk, can signify nothing else, but the beginning and progress of a holy and religious course.

3dly, our diligence and constancy in this course, are represented by striving, a word which hath a great force and emphasis in it, ἀγωνίζεσθαι, a metaphor taken from the earnest contention which was

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used in the olympick games, by those who strove for mastery in running or wrestling, or any of the other exercises which were there used.

Secondly, here is a reason added to enforce the exhortation or duty ; “ for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able : ” that is, there are a great many that will do something in christianity, and make some faint attempts to get to heaven, who yet shall fall short of it, for want of such a firm resolution and earnestness of endeavour, as is necessary to the attaining of it.

Having thus explain’d the words, I shall take occasion from the first part of them, namely, the duty of exhortation, to handle these three points, very useful for us to consider, and to be well instructed in.

1st, the difficulties of a holy and christian course

2dly, the firm resolution and earnest endeavour that is required on our part for the conquering of these difficulties.

3dly, that these difficulties are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just discouragement to our endeavours ; if we will strive, we may master them.

First, the difficulties of a holy and christian course. And these are either from our selves, or from some thing without us.

1. From our selves, from the original corruption and depravation of our nature, and the power of evil habits and customs, contracted by vicious practices. Our natures are vitiated and depraved, inclined to evil, and impotent to good ; besides, that being habituated to sin and vice, it is a matter of infinite difficulty to break off a custom, and to turn the course of our life another way. Now because

this is the difficulty of our first entrance into religion, it is represented by "a strait gate," which is SERM. CXXV. hard to get through.

2. There are likewise other difficulties from without; as namely, the opposition and persecution of the world, which was very raging and violent in the first beginnings of christianity. And this our SAVIOUR represents by the ruggedness and roughness of the way, as St. Matthew expresseth it, chap. vii. 14. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life," *Καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς, confragosa est via*, (so Grotius renders it) the way is craggy, full of afflictions and troubles.

So that these are the two great difficulties in a christian course, indisposition from within, and opposition from without.

1. Indisposition from within. And this makes religion so much the more difficult, because it checks us at our very first entrance upon our christian course, and makes us unwilling to set out. The corruption of our nature, and those vicious habits which by a long custom of sin we have contracted, do strongly incline us to the contrary way, so that a man must offer great force and violence to himself that will conquer this difficulty. It is one of the hardest things in the world to break off a vicious habit, and to get loose from the tyranny of custom. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of it, as next to a natural impossibility, chap. xiii. 23. "Can the ethiopian change his skin? or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." This requires great striving indeed. Nothing shews the spirit and resolution of a man more, than to contend with an inveterate habit; for

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in this case a man strives against the very bent and inclination of his soul; and 'tis easier to set a man against all the world, than to make him fight with himself: and yet this every man must do, who from any wicked course of life, betakes himself seriously to religion; he must as it were lay violent hands upon himself, and fight with the man he was before; and this in scripture is emphatically exprest to us, by "crucifying the old man, with the affections and lusts thereof." A christian when he first enters upon a holy and good course of life, is represented as two persons or parties at civil war one with another "the old, and the new man;" so that whoever will be a christian must put off himself, and become another man; and 'tis no easy matter for a man to quit himself.

2. In our christian course, we must likewise expect to meet with great opposition from without. Blessed be God, christianity hath generally been for many ages free from this difficulty, which attended the first profession of it; it was then indeed a very steep and craggy way, very rough and thorny, not to be travelled in without sweat and blood; the dangers and hazards of the profession were such, as were not to be encountered by a mere moral resolution, and the natural strength of flesh and blood; the persecution that attended it was so hot, and the torments which threatned it so terrible, that the sensual and inconsiderate part of mankind would rather venture he at a distance, than run themselves upon so present and evident a danger.

But since these ages of persecution, this difficulty hath been in a great measure removed. Not but the true religion hath still its enemies in the world; but

and they are not let loose, as they were in those times; SERM.
man is still persecuted and exposed to the malice and CXXV.
with reproach, but not to the rage and fury of unrea-
sonable men. In the calmest times there is hardly
any man can be a strict and sincere christian, without
being liable to hatred and contempt, without deny-
ing himself many of those worldly advantages, which
those who make no conscience of the strict laws
of christianity may make to themselves; so that at
all times it requires a good degree of constancy and
resolution to persevere in a holy course, and to bear up
against the opposition of the world, and to withstand
its temptations, to be "harmless and blameless in the
midst of a crooked and perverse nation;" not to be
infected with the eminent and frequent examples of
vice, and carried down with the stream of a cor-
rupt and degenerate age. So that tho' our difficul-
ties be not always the same, and equal to those which
the primitive christians encountered, yet there is
enough to exercise our best resolution and care;
tho' the main body of the enemies of christianity be
broken, and "the sons of Anak be destroyed out
of the land; yet some of the old inhabitants are
still left, to be thorns in our sides, and pricks in
our eyes," that true religion may always have
something to exercise its force and vigour upon. I
have done with the first point, the difficulties of a
christian course. I proceed to the

Second, the earnest endeavour that is to be used
on our part, for the conquering of these difficul-
ties. And to the business of religion, if we will
set upon it in good earnest, these three things are
required.

SERM. 1st, a mighty resolution to engage us in a holy
CXXV. and christian course.

2dly, great diligence and industry to carry us on in it.

3dly, an invincible constancy to carry us through it, and make us persevere in it to the end.

1st, a mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course. For want of this, most men mis- carry and stumble at the very threshold, and never get through the strait gate, never master the difficulties of the first entrance. Many are well disposed towards religion, and have fits of good inclination that way, (especially in their young and tender years) but they want firmness of resolution to conquer the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious and virtuous life; like the young man that came to our SAVIOUR, well inclined to do some good thing, that "he might inherit eternal life;" but when it came to the point, he gave back, he was divided betwixt CHRIST and the world and had not resolution enough "to part with all for him."

Many men (I doubt not) have frequent thoughts and deliberations about a better course of life, and are in a good mind to take up, and break off that lewd and riotous course they are in; but they cannot bring themselves to a fixt purpose and resolution: and yet without this nothing is to be done "the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." There must be no indifferency and irresoluteness in our minds, if we will be christians we must not stop at the gate, but resolve to press in. We see that men can take up peremptory resolutions in other matters, to be rich and great in the

world,

world, and they can be true and steadfast to these resolutions; and why should not men resolve to be wise and happy, and stand to these resolutions and make them good? God is more ready to assist and strengthen these kind of resolutions than any other; and I am sure no man hath so much reason to resolve upon any thing, as to live a holy and virtuous life; no other resolution can do a man that good, and bring him that comfort and happiness that this will.

2dly, the business of religion, as it requires a mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course, so likewise a great diligence to carry us on in it. When we are got through the strait gate, we must account to meet with many difficulties in our way; there are in the course of a christian life many duties to be performed, which require great pains and care; many temptations to be resisted, which will keep us continually upon our guard; a great part of the way is up hill, and not to be climb'd without labour; and the scripture frequently calls upon us, "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with great care and industry; "to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" to follow holiness, *διώκειν*, to pursue it with great earnestness. Nothing in this world that is of value, is to be had on other terms; and we have low thoughts of heaven, if we think any pains too much to get thither.

3dly, the business of religion requires an invincible constancy to carry us through it, and to make us persevere in it to the end. Resolution may make a good entrance; but it requires great constancy and firmness of mind, to hold out in a good course.

A

SERM.
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A good resolution may be taken up upon a present heat and may cool again; but nothing but a constant and steady temper of mind will make man persevere; and yet without this, no man shall ever reach heaven. "He that continueth to the end shall be saved; but if any man draw back, God's soul will have no pleasure in him." God puts this case by the prophet, and determines Ezekiel xviii. 24. "When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, shall he live?" "all his righteousness that he hath done, shall not be mentioned; in his trespasss that he hath transgressed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die;" nay so far will his righteousness be from availing him, if he do not persevere in it, that it will render his condition much worse, to have gone so far towards heaven, and at last to turn back upon it. So St. Peter tells us, 2 Pet. ii. 21. "For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world, through the knowledge of the LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandments delivered unto them." I proceed to the

Third point, namely, that the difficulties of holy and christian life are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just ground of discouragement to our endeavours. All that I have said concerning the difficulties of religion, was with no design to damp, but rather to quicken our industry; for upon the whole matter, when all things are duly

considered

considered, it will appear that "CHRIST's yoke is easy and his burden light; that the commandments of GOD are not grievous;" no, not this commandment of "striving to enter in at the strait gate;" which I shall endeavour to make manifest by taking these four things into consideration.

I. The assistance which the gospel offers to us. GOD hath there promised "to give his HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him;" and by the assistance of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, we may be able to conquer all those difficulties. Indeed if we were left to ourselves, to the impotency and weakness of our own nature, we should never be able to cope with these difficulties; every temptation would be too hard for us; every little opposition would discourage us: but "GOD is with us, and there is nothing too hard for him." If the principles of a holy life were only the birth of our own resolution, they would easily be worn down; but they are from GOD, of a heavenly birth and original; and whatsoever is "born of GOD, overcometh the world." John i. 12, 13. "As many as received him, [to them gave he the power (*ἐξουσίαν*, the privilege) to become the sons of GOD, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of GOD."

GOD considers the impotency of humane nature, this deprav'd and degenerate state into which we are sunk, and therefore he hath not left us to our selves; but when he commands us to "work out

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our own salvation," he tells us for our encouragement, that "he himself works in us both to will "and to do;" he does not bid us to be strong in our own strength, for he knows we have no strength of our own, but to be "strong in the "LORD, and in the power of his might;" and what may not even a weak creature do, that is so powerfully assisted? if we will but make use of this strength, nothing can be too hard for us. All that GOD expects from us is, that we should comply with the motions of his SPIRIT, and be as sincere in the use of our own endeavours, as he is in the offer of his grace and assistance.

2. Let us consider, that the greatest difficulties are at first; 'tis but making one manful onset, and sustaining the first brunt, and the difficulties will abate and grow less, and our strength will every day increase and grow more. "The gate is strait:" but when we have once got through it, "our feet will be "set in an open place." After some struggling to get thro', we shall every day find our selves a more ease and liberty. It will be very hard at first, to master our vicious inclinations, to change the habit of our minds, and the course of our lives and to act contrary to what we have been long accustomed: but this trouble lasts but for a little while; these pangs of the new-birth, tho' they be sharp, yet they are not usually of long continuance. It does indeed require great resolution and firmness of mind, to encounter the first difficulties of religion: but if we can but stand it out for one brunt, our enemy will give way, and the pleasure of victory will tempt us on. It is troublesome to conflict with

great

great difficulties, and men are loth to be brought to it: but when we are engaged, it is one of the greatest pleasures in the world to prevail and conquer. Many men are loth to go to war; but after a little success, they are as loth to give over; that which was a terror to them at first, turns into a pleasure.

3. Consider that custom will make any course of life tolerable, and most things easy. Religion, and the practice of a holy life is difficult at first; but after we are once habituated to it, the trouble will wear off by degrees, and that which was grievous will become easy; nay, by degrees, much more pleasant than ever the contrary practice was. We see the daily experience of this, in the most difficult and laborious employments of this world; a little pains tires a man at first, but when he is once seasoned and enured to labour, idleness becomes more tedious and troublesome to him than the hardest work. Custom will make any thing easy, tho' it be a little unnatural. Nothing is more unnatural than sin; 'tis not according to our original nature and frame, but it is the corruption and depravation of it, a second nature superinduced upon us by custom; whereas the practice of holiness and virtue is agreeable to our original and primitive state, and sin and vice are the perverting of nature contrary to our reason, and the design of our beings, and to all obligations of duty and interest: but by returning to God and our duty, we return to our primitive state; we act naturally, and according to the intention of our beings; and when the force of a contrary custom is taken off, and the bias clapt on the other side, "we shall run the ways of God's commandments with

SERM. "more delight" and satisfaction, than ever was
 CXXV. found in the ways of sin.

For sin is a violence upon our natures, and that is always uneasy, yet it is made more tolerable by custom: but religion restores men to their natural state, and then we are at ease and rest. Religion is at first a yoke and burden: but unless we take this upon us, we shall never "find rest to our souls."

4thly and lastly, consider the reward that religion propounds, and this must needs sweeten and mitigate all the troubles and difficulties that are occasioned by it. This strait gate, through which we must enter; and this craggy way which we are to climb up, leads to life; and he is a lazy man indeed, that will not strive and struggle for life. As that a man can do, he will do for his life, for this miserable life, which is so short and uncertain, and "born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards; a life not worth the having, nor worth the keeping with any great care and trouble, if it were not in order to a better and happier life. But 'tis not the life which our SAVIOUR means; that indeed were not worth all this striving for: 'tis eternal life; a state of perfect and endless happiness; of "joys unspeakable and full of glory." And who would not "strive to enter in at that gate," which leads to so much felicity? can a man possibly take too much pains, be at too much trouble for a few days, to be happy for ever?

So often as I consider what incredible industrious men use for the things of this life, and to get a small portion of this world, I am ready to conclude that either men do not believe the rewards of

another

another world, or that they do not understand them; else they could not think much to be at the same pains for heaven, that they can chearfully bestow for the obtaining of these corruptible things. Can we be so unconscionable, as to think God unreasonable, when he offers heaven and everlasting happiness to us, upon as easy terms, as any thing in the world is ordinarily to be had? and are not we very foolish and unwise, to put away eternal life from us, when we may have it upon terms so infinitely below the true worth and value of it.

I have now done with the three things which I propounded to speak to from the first part of these words, which are so many arguments to enforce the exhortation here in the text; "to strive to enter in at the strait gate," and to give all diligence, by the course of a holy and virtuous life, to get to heaven; and we may assure ourselves, that nothing less than this will bring us thither. So our SAVIOUR tells us, in the latter part of the text; that "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." I proceed now to the

Second part of the text; the reason or argument whereby this exhortation is enforced; "strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Every seeking to, enter in will not gain our admission into heaven; therefore there must be striving: for men may do many things in religion, and make several faint attempts to get to heaven, and yet at last fall short of it,
for

SERM. for want of earnest contention and endeavour
 CXXV. which is necessary to the attaining of it. We must
 make religion our business, and set about it with
 all our might, and persevere and hold out in it, if
 ever we hope to be admitted to heaven; "for
 " many shall seek to enter, that shall be shut
 " out."

Now what this seeking is, which is here opposed
 to "striving to enter in at the strait gate,"
 our SAVIOUR declares after the text, ver. 25
 "When once the master of the house is risen up
 " and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand
 " without, and knock at the door, saying, LORD
 " LORD, open unto us; and he shall answer and
 " say unto you, I know you not whence ye are
 " then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and
 " drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in
 " our streets; but he shall say, I tell you, I know
 " you not whence ye are; depart from me all ye
 " workers of iniquity." St. Matthew mentions some
 other pretences which they should make; upon
 which they should lay claim to heaven, Matth.
 vii. 21, 22, 23. "Not every one that saith unto me,
 " LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom
 " of heaven: but he that doth the will of my FA-
 " THER which is in heaven. Many will say unto
 " me in that day, LORD, LORD, have we not
 " prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have
 " cast out devils? and in thy name done many
 " wonderful works? and then will I profess unto
 " them, I never knew you; depart from me ye
 " that work iniquity." After all their seeking to
 enter in, and notwithstanding all these pretences,
 they

they shall be shut out, and be for ever banish'd from the presence of GOD. This shall be their doom, which will be much the heavier, because of the disappointment of their confident expectation and hope. So St. Luke tells us, chap. xiii. 28, 29. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of GOD, and ye your selves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of GOD." To which St. Matthew adds, chap. viii. ver 12. "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And then our SAVIOUR concludes (Luke xiii. 30.) "Behold, there are last that shall be first, and first which shall be last." From all which it appears, with what confidence many men, upon these false pretences (which our SAVIOUR calls "seeking to enter in") shall lay claim to heaven, and how strangely they shall be disappointed of their expectation and hope; when they shall find themselves cast out of heaven, who they thought had out-done all others in religion, and were the only members of the true church, and "the children and heirs of the kingdom;" and shall see others, whom they thought to be out of the pale of the true church, and excluded from all terms of salvation, come from all quarters, and find free admission into heaven; and shall find themselves so grossly and widely mistaken, that those very persons, whom they thought to be last, and
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of all others farthest from salvation, shall be first and they themselves, whom they took for "the children of the kingdom," and such as should be admitted into heaven in the first place, shall be rejected and cast out.

So that by "seeking to enter," we may understand all those things which men may do in religion, upon which they shall pretend to lay claim to heaven, nay, and confidently hope to obtain it and yet shall be shamefully disappointed, and fall short of it. Whatever men think, and believe, and do in religion, what privileges soever men pretend, what ways and means soever men endeavour to appease the deity, and to recommend themselves to the divine favour and acceptance, all this is but "seeking to enter in," and is not that striving which our SAVIOUR requires. "If men do not do the will of GOD, but are workers of iniquity," it will all signify nothing to the obtaining of eternal happiness.

Our SAVIOUR here instanceth in mens profession of his religion, "calling him LORD, LORD; in their personal familiarity and conversation with him, by "eating and drinking in his presence and company; in their having heard him preach the doctrine of life and salvation, "thou hast taught in our streets;" in their having prophesied, and wrought great miracles in his name and by his power, "have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" these were great and glorious things which they boasted of; and yet nothing of all this will do, if men "do not the

will

"will of GOD;" notwithstanding all this, he will say unto them, "I know ye not whence ye are, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

And by a plain parity of reason, whatever else men do in religion, what attempts soever men may make to get to heaven, upon what privileges or pretences soever they may lay claim to eternal life, they will certainly fall short of it, if they "do not the will of GOD," but "are workers of iniquity." My business therefore at this time shall be, to discover the several false claims and pretences which men may make to heaven, and yet shall never enter into it. And to this purpose I shall instance in several particulars, by one or more of which men commonly delude themselves, and are apt to entertain vain and ill-grounded hopes of eternal salvation.

1st, some trust to the external profession of the true religion.

2dly, others have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they rely much upon that.

3dly, there are others that find themselves much affected with the word of GOD, and the doctrines contained in it.

4thly, others are very strict and devout in the external worship of GOD.

5thly, others confide much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which therein they have above others of getting to heaven.

6thly, others think their great zeal for GOD and his true religion, will certainly save them.

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7thly,

7thly, others go a great way in the real practice of religion.

8thly, others rely much upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, and become the children of GOD, and heirs of everlasting life; and being once truly so, they can never fall from that state, so as finally to miscarry.

Lastly, others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with GOD to receive them to mercy at the last.

I shall briefly go over these particulars, which are the several ways whereby men "seek to enter into heaven, and hope to get thither at last; and shall shew the insufficiency of them; and that there is something beyond all this necessary to be done for the attainment of everlasting salvation.

1st, some trust to the mere external profession of the true religion, and think it enough to call him LORD, LORD, to be baptized in his name, and thereby to be admitted members of the christian church. What the apostle says of the profession of the jewish religion, and the outward badge of it "circumcision," may be applied to the profession of christianity made in baptism, Rom. ii. 17, 28, 29. "Behold thou art called a Jew, and restandest in the law, and makest thy boast of God." "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision: for he is not a Jew that is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and his circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not

not in the letter." The case is the same of those who make only an outward profession of christianity. "Baptism verily profiteth, if we perform the condition of that covenant which we entered into by baptism;" but if we do not, our baptism is no baptism: for "he is not a christian, which is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a christian which is one inwardly, and baptism is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in water only." So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. iii. 21. that baptism is not only the washing of the body with water, and "the putting away of the filth of the flesh; but the answer of a good conscience towards God."

The promise of eternal life and happiness is not made to the external profession of religion without the sincere and real practice of it. "Why call ye me LORD, LORD, (says our SAVIOUR) and do not the things which I say?" The scripture hath no where said, "he that is baptized shall be saved;" but "he that believeth and is baptized, he that repenteth and is baptized, shall be saved." This deserves to be seriously considered by a great many christians, who have nothing to shew for their christianity, but their names; whose best title to heaven is their baptism, an engagement entered into by others in their name, but never confirmed and made good by an act of their own; a thing which was done before they remember, and which hath no other effect upon their hearts and lives, than if it were quite forgotten.

2dly, there are others who have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they

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hope that will save them. But if our knowledge in religion, though never so clear and great, do not descend into our hearts and lives, and govern our actions, all our hopes of heaven are built upon a false and sandy foundation. So our SAVIOUR tells us, Matth. vii. 26. "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." And John xiii. 17. "If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them."

There is not a greater cheat in religion, nothing wherein men do more grossly impose upon themselves, than in this matter, as if the knowledge of religion, without the practice of it, would bring men to heaven. How diligent are many in reading and hearing the word of God, who yet take no care to practise it in their lives? like those in the prophet, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. of whom God complains, "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear my words; but they will not do them." None do so foolishly, and yet so deservedly miss of happiness, as those who are very careful to learn the way to heaven, and when they have done, will take no pains at all to get thither.

3dly, there are others who find themselves much affected with the word of God, and the preaching of it; and this they take for a very good sign, that it has its due effect upon them. And this happens very frequently, that the word of God makes considerable impressions upon men for the present, and they are greatly affected with it, and troubled for

for their sins, and afraid of the judgments of God, and the terrible vengeance of another world ; and upon this they take up some resolutions of a better course, which after a little while vanish and come to nothing. This was the temper of the people of Israel, they delighted to hear the prophet speak to them in the name of God, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. " And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Mark vi. 20. it is said that Herod had a great reverence for John the baptist, " that he observed him, and heard him gladly;" but yet for all that, he continued the same cruel and bad man that he was before. And in the parable of the sower, Matth. xiii. 20. there are one sort of hearers mention'd, who, " when they heard the word, received it with joy; but having no root in themselves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, presently they are offended." There are many men who have sudden motions in religion, and are mightily affected for the present; but it must be a rooted and fixt principle, that will endure and hold out against great difficulties and opposition. Acts xxiv. 25. it is said that when St. Paul " reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled:" and nothing is more frequent, than for men to be mightily startled at the preaching of the word, when their judgments are convinced and born down, and their consciences touched to the quick; a lively representation of the evil
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of sin, and the infinite danger of a sinful course may stir up the passions of grief and fear, and dart such stings into the consciences of men, and may make them extremely restless and unquiet, and work some good thoughts and inclinations in them towards a better course; and yet like metals, when the heat is over, they may be the harder for having been melted down.

4thly, others shew great strictness and devotion in the worship of God, and this they hope will be accepted, and cannot fail to bring them to heaven: and yet some of the worst of men have been very eminent for this. The Pharisees were the most exact people in the world in matter of external ceremony and devotion; and yet for all this, our SAVIOUR plainly tells them, that "they were farther from the kingdom of God," than those who seemed to be farthest, "than publicans and harlots;" and that because they were so very bad, under so great a pretence of devotion, "therefore they should receive the greater damnation."

Not but that external devotion is a necessary expression of religion, and highly acceptable to God, when it proceeds from a pious and devout mind, and when men are really such in their hearts and lives, as their external devotion represents them to be: but when the outward garb of religion is only made a cloke for sin and wickedness, when there is nothing within to answer all the shew that we see without, nothing is more odious and abominable to God. These are mere engines and poppets in religion, all the motions we see without proceed from an artificial contrivance,

trivance, and not from any inward principle of life; and as no creature is more ridiculous than an ape, because the beast makes some pretence to humane shape; so nothing is more fulsome than this hypocritical devotion, because it looks like religion, but is the farthest from it of any thing in the world.

5thly, others confide very much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which they have thereby above others of getting to heaven. Thus the Jews confined salvation to themselves, and looked upon all the rest of the world as excluded from it. And not only so, but they believed that by one means or other every Israelite should be saved. So that they were the jewish catholick church, out of which there was no hope of salvation for any.

The same pretence is made by some christians at this day, who engross salvation to themselves, and will allow none to go to heaven out of the communion of their church; and have so ordered the matter, that hardly any that are in it can miscarry. They are members of an infallible church, which cannot possibly err in matters of faith, "they have not only eat and drunk in CHRIST's presence," but have eat and drunk his very corporal presence, the natural substance of his flesh and blood; they have not only our blessed SAVIOUR, but innumerable other intercessors in heaven; they have not only their own merits to plead for them, but in case they be defective, they may have the merits of others assigned

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signed and made over to them, out of the infinite stock and treasure of the church, upon which they may challenge eternal life, as of right and due belonging to them; and by a due course of confession and absolution, may quit scores with God for all their sins from time to time. Or if they have neglected all this, they may, after the most flagitious course of life, upon attrition (that is, upon some trouble for sin, out of fear of hell and damnation) joined with confession and absolution, get to heaven at last; provided the priest mean honestly, and do not, for want of intention, deprive them of the saving benefit and effect of this sacrament.

But is it possible men can be deluded at this rate! as to think that confidence of their own good condition, and want of charity to others, will carry them to heaven? that any church hath the privilege to save impenitent sinners? and they are really impenitent, who do not exercise such a repentance, as the gospel plainly requires; and if men die in this state, whatever church they are of, the great judge of the world hath told us, that "he will not know them," but will bid them "to depart from him, because they have been workers of iniquity."

6thly, others think that their zeal for God and his true religion will certainly save them. But zeal, if it be not "according to knowledge," if it be mistaken in its object, or be irregular or excessive in the degree, is so far from being a virtue, that it may be a great sin and fault; and tho' it be for the truth, yet if it be destitute of charity, and separated from the virtues of a good life, it will not avail us. So

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St. Paul tells us, that "tho' a man shall give his body to be burnt; yet if he have not charity, it is nothing."

7thly, others go a great way in the real practice of religion, and this sure will do the business. And it is very true, and certain in experience, that religion may have a considerable awe and influence upon mens hearts and lives, and yet they may fall short of happiness. Men may in many considerable instances perform their duty to God and man; and yet the retaining of one lust, the practice of any one known sin, may hinder them from "entering in at the strait gate." Herod did not only "hear John gladly," but "did many things" in obedience to his doctrine; and yet he was a very bad man. The pharisee thanked God (and it may be truly) "that he was not like other men, an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer;" and yet the penitent publican was "justified before him." The young man who came to our SAVIOUR to know what he should do to enter into life, and of whom our SAVIOUR testifies, that he was "not far from the kingdom of God," and that he "wanted but one thing;" yet for want of that he miscarried. And St. James assures us, that "if a man keep the whole law, and yet fail in one point, he is guilty of all." If we be workers of iniquity in any one kind CHRIST will disown us, and bid us "depart from him."

8thly, others rely upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, from whence they can never finally fall. They did once very heartily repent

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of their wicked lives, and did change their course, and were really reformed, and continued a great while in that good course. And all this may be certainly true, but it is as certain that they are relapsed into their former evil course: and if so, the prophet hath told us their doom, that “ if “ the righteous man forsake his righteousness, his “ righteousness shall not be remembered; but in “ the sin that he hath sinned, in that shall he “ die.” So that “ a righteous man may turn “ from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and “ die in it.” For the prophet doth not here (as some vainly pretend) put a case, which is impossible in fact should happen, unless they will say, that the other case which he puts together with it, of “ the wicked man’s turning away from his wickedness and doing that which is lawful and “ right,” is likewise impossible, which God forbids. And that men may fall from a state of grace, is no matter of discouragement to good men, but a good caution against security, and an argument to greater care and watchfulness, according to that of the apostle, “ let him that standeth take “ heed lest he fall;” which admonition were surely to little purpose, if it were impossible for them that stand to fall.

Lastly, others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at last. This indeed is only “ to “ seek,” and not “ to strive to enter in;” and these perhaps are they whom our SAVIOUR represents as “ standing without, and knocking at the “ door, saying LORD, LORD, open unto us;” or as St. Matthew expresseth it, “ many shall say to

me that day, LORD, LORD," which is most probably meant of the day of judgment, when their case is brought to the last extremity; and next to that is the day of death, when men are entering into a state of endless happiness and misery. And no wonder, if the sinner would then be glad, when he can no longer continue in this world, to be admitted into happiness in the next: but the door is then shut to most sinners, and it is a miracle of GOD's grace and mercy, if any repentance that men can then exercise, (which at the best must needs be very confused and imperfect) will then be accepted; if any importunity which men can then use, will be available. For with what face can we expect, that after all the evil actions of a long life, God should be mollified towards us by a few good words, and accept of a forc'd and constrained repentance for all our wilful and deliberate crimes, and that he should forgive us all our sins upon a little importunity, when we can sin no longer, and will repent no sooner.

Let us then by all that hath been said, be effectually persuaded to mind the business of religion in good earnest, and with all our might, especially the practice of it in the exercise of all the graces and virtues of a good life. Let us heartily repent of all the sins of our past life, and resolve upon a better course for the future; and let us not delay and put off this necessary work to the most unfit and improper time of old age, and sickness, and death: but let us set about it presently, and enter upon a good course, and make all the speed and progress in it we can.

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And let us remember, that whatever we do in religion will not bring us to heaven if we do not “do the will of our FATHER which is in heaven;” if we do not give up our selves to a constant and universal obedience to his laws. This is “to strive to enter in at the strait gate:” and though we “strive to enter in” a thousand other ways, “we shall not be able;” and after all our confidence and conceit of our selves, and our own righteousness, and security of our salvation from the privileges of any church, it will be a strange damp and disappointment to us, to see the sincere christians, who have done the will of GOD, and lived in obedience to his laws, to come from all quarters, and churches in the world, and “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of GOD,” when we who thought our selves “the children of the kingdom, shall be cast out,” because we have been “workers of iniquity.” I will conclude all with those plain words of the apostle, Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. “To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality; eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation, and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; in the day when GOD shall judge the secrets of men by JESUS CHRIST according to the gospel.”

SERMON

S E R M O N CXXVI.

The parable of the rich man, and
Lazarus.

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores,

I intend by GOD's assistance to go over this parable, than which I think there is none in the whole gospel, which is more apt to affect men, or which is more artificially contrived, and in the circumstances whereof a greater decorum is observed.

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The first
sermon on
this text.

It is a great question among interpreters, whether this narration concerning the rich man and Lazarus be a parable, or a history, or a mixture of both. That it is not a history, the resemblance between it and others of our SAVIOUR's parables, will easily convince any man that is not contentious; besides that, in some ancient copies, 'tis usher'd in with this preface, "and he spake a parable to his disciples : a certain rich man, &c."

But yet as some of the ancients have not improbably conjectur'd, it seems to be such a kind of parable, as had something of a real foundation; as namely, that there was such a poor man as Lazarus is here described, and of that name among the Jews: for in a meer parable 'tis altogether unusual

to

SERM. to name persons, nor is this done in any other of our
CXXVI. SAVIOUR's parables.

But whether this be so or not, is not worth the disputing, because it alters not the case as to our SAVIOUR's purpose, and the instructions which we may learn from it.

In the handling of this parable, I shall explain it as I go along, and draw two sorts of instructions or observations from it.

The first sort of observations shall be from the circumstances which serve for the decorum of the parable: and these I will not warrant to be all intended by our SAVIOUR; but only to be true in themselves, and useful, and to have a probable rise from some circumstances of the parable; and therefore I shall speak but very briefly to them.

The second sort of observations shall be such as are grounded upon the main scope and intent of the parable; and these I shall insist more largely upon. I begin,

First, with those observations and instructions which I shall gather up from the circumstances which serve for the decorum of the parable; and I shall take them in order as they lie in the parable.

Ver. 19. "There was a certain rich man, which
"was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared
"sumptuously every day." Some think that our SAVIOUR in this description reflected upon Herod, because he describes this rich man to be "clothed
"in purple." But this conjecture is without reason; for besides that it was not our SAVIOUR's custom in his preaching, to give secret girds to the magistrate; 'tis certain that it was long after our SAVIOUR's time, that purple was appropriated to
kings.

things. It was then, and a great while after, the ^{SERM.}
wear of rich and powerful men, and of the favou- ^{XXVI.}
rites and great men of the court, who are frequently
in ancient histories call'd the *purpurati*, those that
wore purple.

That which I observe from hence, is, that the rich
man is not here censured for enjoying what he had,
for wearing rich apparel, and keeping a great table.
This of it self, if it be according to a man's estate
and quality, and without intemperance, is so far from
being a fault, that it is a commendable virtue. But
here was his fault, that he made all to serve his own
sensuality and luxury, without any consideration of
the wants and necessities of others: whereas one of
the great uses of the plentiful tables of rich men, is
from the superfluity of them to feed the poor and
the hungry.

Ver. 20. "And there was a certain beggar named
"Lazarus," as if our SAVIOUR had said, for in-
stance, poor Lazarus whom ye all knew. And here
I cannot but take notice of the decorum which our
SAVIOUR uses. He would not name any rich
man, because that was invidious, and apt to pro-
voke. He endeavours to make all men sensible of
their duty; but he would provoke none of them by
any peevish reflexion; for nothing is more impro-
per than to provoke those whom we intend to per-
suade. While a man's reason is calm and undisturb-
ed, it is capable of truth fairly propounded; but if
we once stir up mens passions, it is like muddying
of the waters, they can discern nothing clearly af-
terwards. But to proceed in the parable.

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus,
"which was laid at the rich man's gate full of sores,
and

SER M. “ and was desirous to be fed with the crumbs which
 CXXVI. “ fell from his table, moreover the dogs came and
 “ licked his sores.” Here are three great aggravations of the rich man’s uncharitableness.

1st, that here was an object presented it self to him.

2dly, such an object as would move any one’s pity, a man reduc’d to extreme misery and necessity.

3dly, a little relief would have contented him.

1st, here was an object presented it self to him, Lazarus laid at a rich man’s gate; so that as often as he went out of his own house and came in, he could not but take notice of him. Good men that are charitably disposed, will inquire out objects for their charity, and not always stay till they thrust themselves upon them: but he is a very bad man, who, when an object of great pity and charity is presented, is so far from relenting towards him, that he stops his ear to his cry, and turns away his face from him. He is an uncharitable man, who being rich, and hearing of the miseries of others, does not take them into consideration: but what we see with our eyes is much more apt to affect us. So that this was an argument of a very cruel disposition in the rich man, that having so many occasions of seeing Lazarus, he should never be moved to commiserate him.

2dly, here was such an object presented to him, as would move any one’s pity, a man reduced to extreme misery and necessity. Here was no common object of charity, a man, not only in extreme want, but in great pain and anguish, and so helpless, that he was unable to keep off the dogs from being troublesome to him. And yet this did not move him.

3dly, a

3dly, a very little relief would have contented this poor man, and have been a great kindness to him; that which the rich man might have spared without the least prejudice to himself. He would have been glad to have been "fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table;" and yet the parable intimates that the rich man was so hard-hearted, as not to afford him these.

Ver. 22. "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Here was a great and sudden change! he, who when he was alive was neglected by men, and contumeliously expos'd like a dead carcase to the dogs, when he dies, is attended on by the angels, and by them safely conveyed into a state of unspeakable happiness. He who lay at the rich man's gate, and could find no entrance there, is admitted into heaven. "The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's bosom."

'Tis very observable, that our SAVIOUR in this parable represents men as passing immediately out of this life into a state of happiness or torment. And as in no other place of scripture, so neither in this, where it had been so proper, does our SAVIOUR give the least intimation of the state of purgatory, which the church of Rome hath devised, and makes so much profit and advantage of, which, because it is so visible and apparent, we may without uncharitableness suppose to be the reason why they keep such a stir about it.

"And was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." It was an ancient tradition among the Jews, that the angels did attend good men at their death, and carry their souls into paradise, which is

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here called "Abraham's bosom." And this was a proper place for Lazarus, who had been neglected by the rich man; to be conveyed into "Abraham's bosom," who was of a quite contrary temper, and loved to entertain and relieve strangers.

And paradise is fitly call'd "Abraham's bosom," because the Jews had so great a veneration for Abraham, and that deservedly for his eminent faith and obedience, that they gave him the first place among the blessed. Hence is the expression, Matth. viii. 11. of "sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God." Now this expression of "being in Abraham's bosom," is an allusion to the custom of feasts among the Jews, where the most esteemed and beloved guest sat next him that was chief at the feast, and leaned on his bosom. Hence St. John is call'd the disciple whom JESUS loved, because when he sat at meat, he leaned on his bosom. John xiii. 23. Hence likewise is the expression of our SAVIOUR's being "in the bosom of his FATHER," to signify his dearness to him, John i. 18. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten SON which is in the bosom of the FATHER, he hath declared him."

I proceed. "The rich man also died, and was buried." "The rich man also died;" this is very elegant and emphatical, insinuating to us, what the scripture so often takes notice of, that riches, for all mens confidence in them, will not deliver from death. This rich man indeed was out of danger of being starved and famished, as poor Lazarus was. But death had no other ways to come at him. It is probable enough, that he might be surfeited by "fa-
ring

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"ring sumptuously every day." "The rich man
"also died."

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"And was buried." And here again we may observe the strict decorum which our SAVIOUR uses in this parable. It is not said of Lazarus, that he was buried, but only that "he died;" it is probable that he was flung out of the way into some pit or other: but of the rich man it is said, "he was buried." And this is all the advantage which a rich man hath by a great estate after he is dead, to have a pompous and solemn funeral; which yet signifies nothing to him after death, because he is insensible of it.

Ver. 23. "And in hell he lift up his eyes being
"in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and
"Lazarus in his bosom." As corporal acts are attributed to GOD in scripture, so likewise to separated souls.

"In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments;" intimating to us, that this sensual and voluptuous man had stupidly past away his life without any serious thoughts and consideration; but now at last he was awakened, when it was too late, and began to consider. "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in
"torments."

O the stupidity of sinners! who run on blindly in their course, and never open their eyes 'till they are fallen into the pit; who cannot be brought to consider, 'till consideration will do them no good; 'till it serve to no other purpose, but to enrage their consciences, and to multiply the stings of them.

Thus it was with this rich man, "he lift up his
"eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar
"off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Our SAVI-

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OUR represents him as seeing that which would then most probably come to his mind. Feeling his own misery, he began to consider the happy condition of the poor man whom he had so cruelly neglected. And indeed one great part of the torment of hell consists in those reflexions which men shall make upon the happiness which they have wilfully lost and neglected, and the sins whereby they have plunged themselves into that miserable state.

Ver. 24. "And he cried, and said, father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." See how the scene is changed; now he is fain to beg relief of the beggar, who had sued to him in vain.

"Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue." Here is another very decent circumstance; the rich man is represented as not having the face to beg any great relief from Lazarus, towards whom he had been so hard-hearted. "To dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool his tongue," had been a very great favour from Lazarus, to whom the rich man had denied even the "crumbs which fell from his table."

"For I am tormented in this flame." The scripture loves to make use of sensible representations, to set forth to us the happiness and misery of the next life; partly by way of condescension to our understandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our affections. For whilst we are in the body, and immers'd in sense, we are most apt to be moved by such descriptions of things as are sensible.

ble; and therefore the torments of wicked men in hell, are usually in scripture described to us, by one of the quickest and sharpest pains that humane nature is ordinarily acquainted withal, namely, by the pain of burning; fire being the most active thing in nature, and therefore capable of causing the sharpest pains.

But we cannot from these and the like expressions of scripture certainly determine that this is the true and proper pain of hell: all that we can infer from these descriptions is this, that the sufferings of wicked men in the other world, shall be very terrible, and as great, and probably greater than can possibly be described to us by any thing that we are now acquainted withal; for who knows the power of GOD's anger, and the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? for as the glory of heaven, and the joys of GOD's presence are now inconceivable; so likewise are the torments of hell, and the miseries of the damned. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the heart of man," those dreadful things "which GOD prepares for them that hate him." Who can imagine the utmost significancy of those phrases which the scripture uses to set forth this to us, of GOD's being "a consuming fire," of being "tormented in flames," of GOD's "wrath and jealousy smoking" against sinners, and all the curses that are written in his book, falling upon them? who can conceive the horror of those expressions, "of the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched," of GOD's "pouring out the vials of his wrath," of being "deliver'd over to the tormentor," of being "thrust into utter darkness,"

“ nefs,” of being “ cast into the lake of fire and
 “ brimstone?” These forms of speech seem to be
 borrowed from those things which among men are
 most dreadful and affrighting; and to be calculated
 and accommodated to our capacities; and not so
 much intended to express to us the proper and real
 torments of hell, as to convey to us in a more sensi-
 ble and affecting manner the sense of what the scrip-
 ture says in general, that “ it is a fearful thing to
 “ fall into the hands of the living GOD.”

Ver. 25. “ But Abraham said, son, remember
 “ that thou in thy life-time received’st thy good
 “ things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now
 “ he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Abra-
 “ ham said, son, remember.” It is very observa-
 ble, how our SAVIOUR chooses to represent to
 us the discourse between Abraham and the rich
 man; tho’ there was the greatest difference between
 them imaginable, the one was in heaven, and the
 other in hell, yet they treated one another civilly.
 Abraham is brought in giving the common terms
 of civility to this wretched wicked man, and calling
 him son; “ son, remember.” It was indeed a very
 severe thing which he said to him; he put him in
 mind of his former prosperity, and of his fault in
 his unmerciful usage of Lazarus; “ remember, son,
 “ that thou in thy life-time received’st thy good
 “ things, and Lazarus, &c.” But yet whilst he
 speaks such sharp things to him, he bates bad lan-
 guage. A man may say very severe things, where
 a just occasion requires it; but he must use no re-
 viling; *rem ipsam dic, mitte malè loqui*, “ say the
 “ thing, but use no bad language.” And this, as
 one says, is the true art of chiding, the proper stile
 wherein

wherein we must use to reprove. If we do it with malice, and anger, and contempt, it is misbecoming, even tho' we despair of doing good : but if we hope for any good effect, we are like to miss of it this way ; for as the apostle says excellently, " the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Some think that Abraham gives the rich man the title of son ironically, and by way of jeer : but without all reason. For surely there is not so much bad nature in heaven, as to scoff at those who are in misery. Besides that, we find our SAVIOUR observing this decorum of good language in other of his parables : as particularly, in that of the king who invited guests to the marriage of his son, Matth. xxii. 11. When the king saw there the man, that came without his wedding garment, tho' he past a very severe sentence upon him, yet he gives him the common terms of civility ; " friend, how camst thou hither ? "

This should teach us christians, how we ought to demean ourselves towards those who are at the greatest distance from us, and how we ought to behave ourselves towards one another in the greatest differences of religion. None sure can be at greater distance, than Abraham in paradise, and the rich man in hell ; and yet our SAVIOUR would not represent them as at terms of defiance with one another. One might have expected that Abraham should have reviled this poor wretch, and disdain'd to have spoken to him : but this is not the temper of heaven, nor ought it to be of good men upon earth, even towards the worst of men.

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patience with one another in our religious differences! we think no terms bad enough to use towards one another: and yet one of the most famous disputes that we find mentioned in scripture and that between the most opposite parties that can be imagined, was managed after another fashion; I mean that recorded by St. Jude between Michael the archangel, and the devil, ver. 9. "Ye
 " Michael the archangel, when contending with
 " the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses
 " durst not bring a railing accusation," he durst not allow himself this, no not in the heat of dispute, when persons are most apt to fly out into passion, because it was indecent, and would have been displeasing to God; this I believe is the true reason why it is said, " he durst not bring a railing accusation." And yet I may add another, which is not improper for our consideration, I am sure it hath a good moral; the devil would have been too hard for him at railing, he was better skill'd at that weapon, and more expert at that kind of dispute.

Which consideration may be a good argument to us against reviling any man. If we revile the good, we are unjust, because they deserve it not; if we revile the bad, we are unwise, because we shall get nothing by it. I could almost envy the character which was given of one of the Romans *nescivit quid esset maledicere*, " he knew not what it was to give bad language."

I proceed. " Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." " Thy good things," those which thou didst value and esteem

to highly, and didst place thy chief happiness in, SERM.
as if there had been no other good to be sought CXXXVI.
after. "Thy good things," and indeed so he used
them, as if he had been the sole lord and pro-
prietor of them, and they had not been commit-
ted to him, as a steward, to be dispensed for his
master's use, for the clothing of the naked, and the
feeding of the hungry, and the relieving of those
in distress.

Ver. 27, 28. "Then he said, I pray thee there-
fore, father, that thou wouldst send him to
my father's house: for I have five brethren; that
he may testify unto them, lest they also come
into this place of torment." Here the rich man,
tho' in hell, is represented as retaining some ten-
derness for his relations, as solicitous lest they should
be involved in the same misery with himself. The
last piece of that which commonly remains in men,
is natural affection, which is not so much a virtue,
as a natural principle, and is common to many
brute beasts. When a man puts off this, we may
give him up for lost to all manner of goodness. To
be "without natural affection," is the worst cha-
racter can be given of a man. Our SAVIOUR
represents this rich man in hell as not so totally
degenerate as to be quite destitute of this.

I think some attribute this motion of the rich
man concerning his brethren to another cause; as
if he had desired it, not out of kindness to them,
but out of regard to himself, as being afraid that
if his brethren who probably were corrupted by
his example, had perish'd by that means, it would
have been an aggravation of his torments. But this
conjecture is too subtle, and without any good
ground;

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ground; for every man carries his burden of guilt with him out of this world, and it is not increased by any consequence of our actions here. For the crime of a bad example is the same whether men follow it or not, because he that gives bad example to others, does what in him lies to draw them into sin; and if they do not follow it, that is no mitigation of his fault.

I have but one observation more, and that is from the mention of his brethren as his nearest relations, which is a great aggravation of the rich man's uncharitableness, because he is represented as having no children to take care for, and yet he would not consider the poor.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, endeavour'd to explain this parable, and have made such observations from the circumstances of it, as may be useful for our instruction. But as I promised at first; I will not warrant all these observations to be certainly intended by our SAVIOUR; I know very well that every circumstance of a parable is not to be prest too far, the moral accommodation does chiefly belong to the main scope of it, and many circumstances are only brought in to fill up the parable, and to make up a handsomer way for that which is most material, and principally intended; but so long as the observations are true and useful, and have a fair colour and occasion from the circumstances, it is well enough; to be sure there is no harm done. I proceed to the second sort of observations, namely, such as are drawn from the main scope and intent of the parable, which I promised to speak more largely to; and they are five which I shall handle in order.

First,

First, I observe that uncharitableness and unmercifulness to the poor, is a great and damning sin.

We find no other fault imputed to the rich man but this, that he took no care out of his superfluity and abundance to relieve this poor man that lay at his gate. He is not charged for want of justice, but of charity; not for having got a great estate by fraud or oppression, but that in the midst of this abundance he had no consideration and pity for those that were in want.

I shall endeavour to make out this observation by the parts of it.

1st, that unmercifulness and uncharitableness to the poor is a great sin.

2dly, such a sin, as alone and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. I shall speak to these severally.

1st, that unmercifulness and uncharitableness to the poor is a very great sin. It contains in its very nature two black crimes, inhumanity and impiety.

1. Inhumanity; it is an argument of a cruel and savage disposition, not to pity those that are in want and misery. And he doth not truly pity the miseries of others, that doth not relieve them when he hath ability and opportunity in his hands. Tenderness and compassion for the sufferings of others is a virtue so proper to our nature, that it is therefore call'd humanity, as if it were essential to humane nature, and as if without this, we did not deserve the name of men. To see men like ourselves, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," labour under want and necessity, and yet not to be moved to commiserate them, this is

a sign that we have put off our own nature, otherwise we should pity the sufferings of it in others. For whenever we behold a man like ourselves groaning under want, and prest with necessity, and do not relent towards him, and are not ready to relieve him, we are hard-hearted to our own nature, and do in some sense what the apostle says "no man ever did" (that is, none retaining the temper and affections of a man) "hate his own flesh."

This the scripture speaks of as a most barbarous sort of inhumanity, and calls it murder, 1 John iii. 15. "Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer;" and not to relieve our brother in want, is to hate him; for this is the instance which the apostle gives at the 17th verse, "whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in want, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him; whoso doth not consider the poor, is a manslayer and a murderer, he is cruel to his own nature, nay were he sufficiently sensible of the condition of humane nature, he is cruel to himself.

Seest thou a poor man in great misery and want, there is nothing that hath befallen him, but what is common to man, what might have been thy lot and portion as well as his, and what may happen to thee or thine another time. Make it therefore thine own case; (for so the providence of God may make it one time or other, and thou provokest him to make it so speedily by thy unmerciful disposition toward the poor;) I say, make it thine own case, if thou wert in the poor man's condition, and he in thine, consult thine own bowels and tell me how thou wouldst wish him to be affected

ected toward thee. Wouldst thou be willing that SERM. CXXVI. he should slight and repulse thee, and shut up his bowels of compassion from thee? if not, then do not thou so deal with him, consider that it may be thine own case, therefore do not thou give the world any bad example in this kind, do not teach men to be unmerciful, lest they learn of thee, and thou find the ill effects of it, when it comes to be thine own condition. This is the first aggravation of this sin, the inhumanity of it. But,

2. Besides the inhumanity of this sin, it is likewise a great impiety toward God. Unmercifulness to the poor hath this fourfold impiety in it; it is a contempt of God; an usurpation upon his right; a slighting of his providence; and a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere.

1. It is a contempt of God, and a reproaching of him; so Solomon tells us, Prov. xiv. 31. "He that oppresseth the poor," (not only he that dealeth unjustly with a poor man, but he that is uncharitable towards him, as appears by the opposition, "but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor;" here oppression of the poor is opposed to want of charity towards him;) "he that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his maker." How is that? he despiseth God who made him after his own image and likeness: for the poor man bears the image of God as well as the rich, so that thou canst not oppress or neglect him, without some reflexion upon God, whose image he bears.

2. The uncharitable man is an usurper upon God's right, "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and he hath given it to the children of men,"

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“men,” not absolutely to dispose of as they please, but in trust, and with certain reservations, so as to be accountable to him for the disposal of it. In respect of other men, we are indeed true proprietors of our estates: but in respect of GOD, we are but stewards; and he will call us to an account how we have laid them out. So much as we need is ours, but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our family, in the rank where GOD hath placed us, all that is given to us, that we may give it to others. And if GOD hath been liberal to us in the blessings of this life, it is on purpose to give us an opportunity, and to engage us to be so to others that stand in need of our charity, and we are false to our trust, if we keep those things to our selves, which we receive from GOD for the very end that we might distribute them to others according to the proportion of our ability and the necessity. This is to hide our LORD's talent in a napkin, and that which thou storest up in this case is unjustly detained by thee; for GOD intended it should have been for bread for the hungry, and for clothes for the naked, for the relief and support of those who were ready to perish.

3. The uncharitable man is impious in slighting GOD's providence. He does not consider that riches and poverty are of the LORD, that he can soon change our condition, and that it is an easy thing with him to make a rich man poor. We do not sufficiently reverence the providence which rules the world, if when GOD hath blest us with plenty and abundance, we have no pity and regard for those that are in need. GOD can soon turn the wheel, and lay thee as low as the poor man whom thou dost neglect.

He can "cast down the mighty from their seat, and exalt the humble and the meek; fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich empty away."

GOD's providence could easily have disposed of things otherwise, to have secured every man from want: but he hath on purpose order'd this variety of conditions, high and low, rich and poor, not that some men might have an advantage to insult over and despise others, but that there might be an opportunity for the exercise of several virtues; that the poor might have an opportunity to exercise their dependence upon GOD, and their patience and submission to his will; and that the rich might shew their temperance, and moderation, and charity.

4. Unmercifulness to the poor is a plain demonstration that we do not love GOD, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere. St. James tells us, that "pure religion is undefiled before GOD and the FATHER, is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow," James i. 27. That "the wisdom which is from above is full of mercy and good fruits," chap. iii. 17. St. John represents this uncharitable disposition as utterly inconsistent with the true love of GOD, John iii. 17. "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him; how dwelleth the love of GOD in him?" In vain does such a man pretend to love GOD; nay, chap. iv. ver. 20. he tells us that it is impossible such a man should love GOD. "If a man say I love GOD, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how
" can

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“ can he love G O D whom he hath not seen?” This deserves to be seriously consider’d by those who make a great shew of devotion, and are at great pains in prayer, and fasting, and reading, and hearing the word of G O D, and in all other frugal exercises of religion, which stand them in no money; lest all their labour be lost for want of this one necessary and essential part; lest with the young man in the gospel, after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by C H R I S T for lack of “ this one thing.” I have done with the first part of the observation, that unmercifulness is a very great sin. I proceed to the

2d, that it is such a sin, as alone, and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. The parable lays the rich man’s condemnation upon this; it was the guilt of this sin that tormented him when he was in hell. The scripture is full of severe threatnings against this sin. Prov. xxi. 13. “ Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.” G O D will have no regard or pity for the man that regardeth not the poor. That is a terrible text James ii. 13. “ He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.”

Our S A V I O U R hath two parables to represent to us the danger of this sin; this here in the text, and that in Luke xii. concerning the covetous man that enlarged his barns, and was still laying up, but laid nothing out upon the poor: upon which our S A V I O U R makes this observation, which is the moral of the parable, ver. 21. “ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God;” so shall he be, such an issue of his

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fully may every one expect, who layeth up treasure SER M.
for himself, but does not lay up riches with GOD. CXXXVI.
How is that? the scripture tells us, by works of
mercy and charity; this our SAVIOUR calls
“laying up for our selves treasures in heaven;”
Matth. vi. 20. And Luke xii. 33. he calls giving of
alms, “providing for our selves bags that wax
“not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not.”

There is no particular grace and virtue to
which the promise of eternal life is so frequently
made in scripture, as to this of mercy and cha-
rity to the poor. Matth. v. 7. “Blessed are the
“merciful, for they shall find mercy.” Which
promise, as it does not exclude a reward in this
world, so it seems principally to respect the mercy
of GOD at the great day. Luke xiv. 12, 13, 14.
“When thou makest a feast, invite not the rich,
“for they will recompense thee again: but invite
“the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and
“the blind, for they cannot recompense thee;
“but thou shalt be recompensed at the resur-
“rection of the just,” Luke xvi. 9. “Make
“therefore to your selves friends of the mammon
“of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail, they
“may receive you into everlasting habitations.”
1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. “Charge them that are
“rich in this world, that they do good, that they
“be rich in good works, ready to distribute, wil-
“ling to communicate, laying up in store for them-
“selves a good foundation,” as the word *θεμέλιος*
is sometimes used, “a good treasure against the
“time which is to come, that they may lay hold of
“eternal life.”

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But the most considerable text of all other to this purpose, is in Matth. xxv. where our SAVIOUR gives us a description of the judgment of the great day and if that be a true and proper representation of the process of that day, then the grand enquiry will be what works of charity have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly sentence shall be passed upon us.

The proper result from all this discourse is to persuade men to this necessary duty. Our eternal happiness does not so much depend upon the exercise of any one single grace or virtue, as this of charity and mercy. Faith and repentance are more general and fundamental graces, and as it were the parents of all the rest: but of all single virtues the scripture lays the greatest weight upon this of charity; and if we do truly believe the precepts of the gospel, and the promises and threatening of it, we cannot but have a principal regard to it.

I know how averse men generally are to this duty which makes them so full of excuses and objections against it.

1. They have children to provide for. This is not the case of all, and they whose case it is, may do well to consider, that it will not be amiss to leave a blessing, as well as an inheritance to their children.

2. They tell us they intend to do something when they die. I doubt that very much; but granting their intention to be real, why should men choose to spoil a good work, and take away the grace and acceptableness of it, by the manner of doing? it shews a great backwardness to the work when

when we defer it as long as we can. He that will S E R M.
not do good, till he be forced by the last neces- CXXVI.
sity, *diu noluit*, "was long unwilling." It is one
of the worst compliments we can put upon God,
to give a thing to him when we can keep it no
longer.

3. Others say they may come to want themselves,
and it is prudence to provide against that. To this
I answer.

(1.) I believe that no man ever came the sooner to
want for his charity. David hath an express obser-
vation to the contrary, Psal. xxxvii. 25. "I have
been young and now am old, yet have I not
seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging
bread." And tho' he uses a general word, yet
that by the righteous here he intended the merciful
man, is evident from the next words, "he is ever
merciful and lendeth."

And besides David's observation, we have ex-
press promises of God to secure us against this
fear. Psal. xli. 1, 2. "Blessed is he that consider-
eth the poor, the LORD will deliver him in
time of trouble, the LORD will preserve him
and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon
the earth." Prov. xxviii. 27. "He that giveth
unto the poor shall not lack."

(2.) Thou mayest come to want tho' thou give
nothing; thou may'st lose that which thou hast
spared in this kind as well as the rest; thou may'st
lose all and then thou art no better secured
against want, than if thou hadst been charitable.
Besides that, when thou art brought to poverty, thou
wilt want the comfort of having done this duty.

and may't justly look upon the neglect of this duty as one of the causes of thy poverty.

(3.) After all our care to provide for our selves we must trust the providence of GOD; and a man can in no case so safely "commit himself to GOD" as in well-doing." If the providence of GOD (as we all believe) be peculiarly concern'd to bless one man more than another, I dare say the charitable man will not have the least portion.

4. There is a worse objection than all these made by some grave men, who would be glad under pretence of piety to slip themselves out of this duty; and that is this, that it favours of poverty to press good works with so much earnestness upon men, as if we could merit heaven by them; so that they dare not be charitable out of a pious fear, as they pretend, lest hereby they should entertain the doctrine of merit.

But if the truth were known, I doubt covetousness lies at the bottom of this objection: however it is fit it should be answer'd. And,

(1.) I say that no man that is not prejudiced either by his education or interest, can think that a creature can merit any thing at the hand of GOD, to whom all that we can possibly do, is antecedently due; much less that we can merit so great a reward as that of eternal happiness.

(2.) Tho' we deny the merit of good works, yet we firmly believe the necessity of them to eternal life. And that they are necessary to eternal life, is as good an argument to persuade a wise man to do them, as if they were meritorious; unless a man be so vain-glorious as to think heaven not worth the having

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having unless he purchase it himself at a valuable consideration. SERM.
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And now let me earnestly intreat you, as you love **GOD** and your own souls, not to neglect this duty; lest you bring your selves to the same miserable state with this rich man, to whom the least charity that could be ask'd was denied. Our **SAVIOUR** hath purposely left this parable on record, to be a testimony and a witness to us; lest we being guilty of the same sin, "should come into the same place of torment."

And if any ask me according to what proportion of his estate he ought to be charitable? I cannot determine that. Only, let no man neglect his duty, because I cannot (and it may be no one else can) tell him the exact proportion of his charity to his estate. There are some duties that are strictly determined, as those of justice; but **GOD** hath left our charity to be "a free-will offering." In the proportion of this duty, every one must determine himself by prudence and the love of **GOD**: **GOD** hath left this duty undetermined, to try the largeness of our hearts towards him; only to encourage us to be "abundant in this grace," he hath promised, that according to the proportion of our charity, shall be the degree of our happiness, 2 Cor. ix. 6. "He that soweth plentifully, shall reap plentifully." But let us be sure to do something in this kind; any part of our estate rather than none.

I will conclude with that excellent counsel of the son of Syrach, Eccl. iv. "My son, defraud not the poor, and make not the needy eye to wait long; make not a hungry soul sorrowful, neither provoke a man in his distress; add not more trou-
" ble

"ble to a heart that is vexed, defer not to give to
 "him that is in need. Reject not the supplication
 "of the afflicted, nor turn away thy face from a
 "poor man; turn not away thy eye from the needy,
 "and give him none occasion to curse thee. For
 "if he curse thee in the bitterness of his soul, his
 "prayer shall be heard of him that made him. Let
 "it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the
 "poor, and give him a friendly answer with meek-
 "ness. Be as a father to the fatherless, and instead
 "of a husband to their mother; so shalt thou be
 "as the S O N of the most high, and he shall love
 "thee more than thy mother doth."

S E R M O N CXXVII.

The parable of the rich man, and
 Lazarus.

L U K E xvi. 19, 20.

*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in
 purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:
 and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus,
 which was laid at his gate full of sores.*

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The second
 sermon on
 this text.

I Proceed to our second observation, that a man
 may be poor and miserable in this world, and
 yet dear to G O D. The begger Lazarus, tho'
 he was so much slighted, and despised in his life-
 time by this great rich man, yet it appeared when
 he came to die, that he was not neglected by G O D,

for

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for " he gave his angels charge concerning him," SER M.
to convey him to happiness, ver. 22. " the beg- CXXVII.
" gar died, and was carried into Abraham's bo-
" som."

But this truth is not only represented to us in a parable, but exemplified in the life of our blessed SAVIOUR. Never was any man so dear to GOD as he was, for he was " his only begotten SON, " his beloved SON, in whom he was well pleased : " and yet how poor and mean was his condition in this world ! infomuch that the Jews were offended at him, and could not own one that appeared in so much meanness, for the true MESSIAS. He was born of mean parents, and persecuted as soon as he was born ; he was destitute of worldly accommodations ; " the foxes had holes, and the " birds of the air had nests ; but the SON of man " had not where to lay his head. He was despised " and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

GOD could have sent his SON into the world with majesty and great glory, and have made all the kings of the earth to have bowed before him, and paid homage to him : but the wisdom of GOD chose rather that he should appear in a poor and humble, in a suffering and afflicted condition, to confound the pride of the world, who measure the love of GOD by these outward things, and think that GOD hates all those whom he permits to be afflicted.

Now it was not possible to give a greater and clearer demonstration of this truth, that goodness and suffering may meet together in the same person, than in the SON of GOD, " who did no sin, neither
" was

SERM. " was guile found in his mouth ; yet it pleased the
 CXXVII. " LORD to bruise him, and to put him to grief."

Afflictions in this world are so far from being a sign of God's hatred, that they are an argument of his love and care ; " whom the LORD loveth " he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he " receiveth." Those he designs for great things hereafter, he trains up by great hardships in this world, and by many tribulations prepares them for a kingdom. This course GOD took more especially in the first planting of christianity ; the poor chiefly were those that received the gospel. " Not " many mighty, nor many noble ; but the base " things of the world, and the things that were " despised did GOD choose." " Hearken my " beloved brethren, (saith St. James chap. ii. 5.) " hath not GOD chosen the poor in this world, rich " in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he " hath promised to them that love him ? "

Now this consideration should persuade to patience under the greatest sufferings and afflictions in this world. GOD may be our FATHER, and chasten us severely ; nay this very thing is rather an argument that he is so. GOD may love us tho' the world hate us. 'Tis but exercising a little patience, and these storms will blow over, and we shall be removed into a calmer region, where " all tears " shall be wiped from our eyes ; and death and sorrow shall be no more." This was the portion of the SON of GOD here ; but " it is a faithful saying, that if we be dead with him, we shall also " live with him, if we suffer with him, we shall " also reign with him." Therefore those who suffer in this world ought not to be moved, " as tho' " some

"some strange thing happened unto them; but they
"should rather rejoice, in as much as they are par-
"takers of CHRIST's sufferings, that when his
"glory shall be revealed, they also may be glad
"with exceeding joy," 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. I pro-
ceed to a

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Third observation, which is the different estate of
good and bad men after this life; "Lazarus died,
"and was carried by the angels into Abraham's
"bosom: the rich man died, and went to hell."

This the justice of divine providence seems to
require; so that if there had been no revelation of
God to this purpose, it is a thing very credible to
natural reason, whether we consider God or our
selves. If we consider God, our reason tells us,
that he is the holy and righteous governor of the
world, and consequently, that he loves goodness
and hates sin, and therefore is concern'd to counte-
nance the one, and discountenance the other, in such
a solemn and publick manner, as may vindicate his
holiness and justice to the world. Now the dis-
pensations of his providence are promiscuous in this
world; and therefore it seems very reasonable, that
there should be a general assize, a fair and open
trial; when "God will render to every man accord-
"ing to his works."

And if we consider ourselves, this will appear
very credible; for this has been the constant opi-
nion, not only of the common people, but of the
wisest persons, who had only the light of nature
to guide them. Nay, if we do but search our own
consciences, we shall find an inward and secret ac-
knowledgment of this, in that inward peace and
satisfaction we find in any good action, and in that

SERM. shame and fear and horror that haunts a man
CXXVII. after the commission of any, tho' never so secret
a sin.

And as reason and scripture together do assure us of a future judgment; so likewise, that men, when they pass out of this world, shall meet with the proper consequences and rewards of their actions in the other. And tho' the happiness or misery of men be not so compleat as it shall be after the publick judgment; yet it is unspeakably great. Lazarus is represented as very happy immediately after his passing out of this world, he is said to be "carried into Abraham's bosom;" by which the Jews express the happiness of the future state. And the rich man is represented, as in great anguish and torment. But what the happiness of good men and the misery of wicked men shall be in the other state, we can but now imperfectly and unskillfully describe. Each of these I have in another discourse * spoken something to. I proceed to a

Fourth observation, the vast difference between mens conditions in this world, and the other. The rich man prospered here, and was afterwards tormented: Lazarus was poor and miserable in this world, and happy in the other; ver. 25. "Remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst the good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." And it is very agreeable to the wisdom of GOD, to make such a difference between mens conditions in this world and the other; and that for these two reasons.

1st, for the trying of mens virtue.

* Sermon CLXIII on Rom. vi. 21, 22.

2dly, in order to the recompensing of it.

1. For the trial of mens virtue. For this end principally GOD ordains the sufferings of good men, and permits the best of his servants many times to be involved in the greatest calamities, to try their faith in him, and love to him; to improve their virtue, and to prevent those sins into which the mighty temptations of a perpetual prosperity are apt to draw even the best of men; to take off their affections from the love of this vain world, and to engage and fix them there, where they shall never repent that they have placed them; to prove their sincerity towards GOD, and to exercise their patience and submission to his will; to prepare them for the glory of the next life, and to make the happiness of heaven more welcome to them, when they shall come to it.

2dly, in order to the recompensing of men: that they who will take up with the pleasures and enjoyments of this present world, and take no care for their future state, that they who will gratify their senses, and neglect their immortal souls, may inherit the proper consequences of their wretched choice. And on the other hand, that they who love GOD above all things, and had rather endure the greatest evils, than do the least, that they who look beyond the present scene of things, and believe the reality and eternity of the other state, and live accordingly, may not be disappointed in their hopes, and serve GOD and suffer for him for nothing. From this consideration of the difference between the condition of men in this world and the other, we may infer,

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1. That no man should measure his felicity or unhappiness by his lot in this world. If thou receivest thy good things, art rich and honourable, and hast as much of the things of this world as thine heart can wish, art splendidly attired, and "fares sumptuously every day;" art "in no trouble like other men, neither art plagued like other folk;" do not upon this bless thyself as the happy man. On the other hand, art thou poor and miserable, destitute of all the conveniences and accommodations of this life? do not repine at thy lot, and murmur at God for having dealt hardly with thee. No man can be pronounced happy or miserable for what befalls him in this life; "no man knows love or hatred by these things;" this life is but a short and inconsiderable duration, and it matters not much what entertainment we meet withal, as we are passing through this world: the state of eternity is that wherein the happiness or misery of men shall be determined. He is the happy man who is so in that life which shall never have an end; and he is miserable that shall be so for ever.

2. We should not set too great a value upon the blessings of this life. We may "receive our good things" here, and "be tormented" hereafter; nay, this very thing will be no inconsiderable part of our torment, none of the least aggravations of our misery, that we "did receive our good things." Nothing afflicts a man more, and toucheth him more sensibly when he is in misery, than the remembrance of his former prosperity; had he never been happy, his misery would be the less.

Therefore we should be so far from applauding our selves in the prosperity of this world, that we should

should rather be afraid of "receiving our good things" here; lest God should put us off with these things, and this should be all our portion, and lest our misery in the next world be the greater for our having been happy. SERM.
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The felicities of this world are transient, and tho' our happiness were never so compleat, yet it is going off, and passing away; and when it is gone and past, if misery succeed it, it had better never have been. "Remember, thou in thy life-time received'st thy good things;" these things are only for our life-time, and how short is that! did men seriously consider this, they would not set such a price upon any of the transient enjoyments of this life, as for the sake of them to neglect the great concernments of another world. We are apt to be dazzled with the present glittering of worldly glory and prosperity - but if we would look upon these things as they will be shortly gone from us, how little would they signify! the rich man here in the parable did, no doubt, think himself a much happier man than poor Lazarus that lay at his door; and yet after a little while how glad would he have been to have changed conditions with this poor man! when he was "in torments," then no doubt he wish'd that he had suffered all the misery and want in this world which Lazarus did, provided he might have been comforted as he was, and "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." We should value this world, and look upon it, as this rich man did, not when he enjoyed it, but when he was taken from it; and we should esteem it, and use it while we may, as he wish'd he had done when it was too late.

3. We should not be excessively troubled if we meet with hardship and affliction here in this world because those whom GOD designs for the greater happiness hereafter, may receive evil things here. Thus our blessed SAVIOUR, "the captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings;" this was the method which GOD uses towards his own SON, first "he suffered, and then entered into glory." He suffered more than any of us can bear; and yet he supported himself under all his sufferings by the consideration of the glory that would follow; "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame."

The same consideration should arm us with patience and constancy under the greatest evils of this life. The evils that we lie under are passing and going off; but the happiness is to come. And if the happiness of the next world were no greater nor of longer continuance, than the miseries of this world; or if they did equally answer one another yet a wise man would choose to have misery first and his happiness last. For if his happiness were first, all the pleasure and comfort of it would be eaten out by dismal apprehensions of what was to follow: but his sufferings, if they were first, would be sweetened by the consideration of his future happiness; and the bitterness of his sufferings would give a quicker relish to his happiness when it should come, and make it greater.

But a good man under the sufferings of this life hath not only this comfort, that his happiness is to come, but likewise that it shall be infinitely greater than his sufferings; that these are but short, but

that shall never have an end. And this was that SERM.
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which fortified the first christians against all that
the malice and cruelty of the world could do against
them. They thought themselves well paid, if
“through many tribulations they might at last
“enter into the kingdom of God;” because they
believed that the joys of the next life would abundantly recompense all their labours and sufferings in this world. They expected a mighty reward far beyond all their sufferings; they were firmly persuaded that they should be vast gainers at the last. So the apostle tells us of himself, Rom. viii. 18. “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.” And to the same purpose, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. “Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” If we would consider all things together, and fix our eyes as much upon the happiness and glory of the next world, as upon the pomp and splendor of this; if we would look as much at the things which are not seen, as the things which are seen,” we should easily perceive, that he who suffers in this world does not renounce his happiness, only puts it out to interest, upon terms of the greatest advantage.

4. We should do all things with a regard to our future and eternal state. It matters not much what our condition is in this world, because that’s to continue but for a little while: but we ought to have

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have a great and serious regard to that state that never shall have an end. Therefore whenever we are doing any thing, we should consider what influence such an action will have upon the happiness or misery of the next life. We should measure every action and every condition of our lives by the reference of them to eternity. To be rich and great in this world will contribute nothing to our future happiness; all these things which we so much dote upon, and pursue with so much eagerness, will not commend any man to GOD; they will signify nothing when we come to appear before our judge. Death will strip us of these things, and in the other world, the soul of the poorest man that ever lived shall be upon equal terms with the richest. Nothing but holiness and virtue will then avail us; and it is but a little while and we shall all certainly be of this mind, that the best thing men can do in this world, is to provide for the other. I proceed to a

Fifth observation, that the state of men in the next world is fixt and unchangeable; which I ground upon ver. 26. "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixt, so that they that would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence". By which words our SAVIOUR seems not only to intend, that they that are in heaven and hell can have no communication and intercourse with one another; but likewise that they are lodg'd in an immutable state. Those that are happy are like to continue so; and those that are miserable are immutably fixt in that state.

1. As to those that are in happiness there can be no great doubt. For what can tempt men that have

have so narrowly escap'd the dangers and temptations of a wicked world, and are possess'd of so great a happiness by the free grace and mercy of GOD, to do any thing whereby they may forfeit their happiness; or so much as to entertain a thought of offending that GOD, to whom they cannot but be sensible how infinitely they are oblig'd? In this imperfect state few men have so little goodness as to sin without temptation; but in that state where men are perfectly good, and can have no temptation to be otherwise, it is not imaginable that they should fall from that state.

2. As to the state of the damned, that that likewise is immutable the scripture does seem plainly enough to assert, when it calls it "an everlasting destruction from the presence of the LORD," and uses such expressions to set forth the continuance of their misery, as signify the longest and most interminable duration, expressions of as great an extent as those which are used to signify the eternal happiness of the blessed; and as large and unlimited, as any are to be had in those languages wherein the scriptures are written.

Besides that wicked men in the other world are in scripture represented as in the same condition with the devils, of whom there is no ground to believe that any of them ever did or will repent. Not because repentance is impossible in its own nature to those that are in extreme misery; but because there is no place left for it. Being under an irreversibile doom, there is no encouragement to repentance, no hope of mercy and pardon, without which repentance is impossible. For if a man did utterly despair of pardon, and were assured upon good

ground, that **GOD** would never shew mercy to him, in this case a man would grow desperate and not care what he did. He that knows whatever he does, he is miserable and undone, will not matter how he demeans himself. All motives to repentance are gone after a man once knows it will be to no purpose. And this the scripture seems to represent to us, as the case of the devil and damned spirits. Because their state is finally determined, and they are concluded under an irreversible sentence, therefore repentance is impossible to them.

Sorry, no doubt, they are, and heartily troubled that by their own sin and folly they have brought this misery upon themselves, and they cannot but conceive an everlasting displeasure against themselves, for having been the cause and authors of their own ruin; and the reflexion of this will be a perpetual spring of discontent, and fill their minds with eternal rage and vexation; and so long as they feel the intolerable punishments of sin, and grope under the insupportable torments of it, and see no end of this miserable state, no hope of getting out of it, they can be no otherwise affected, than with discontent to themselves and rage and fury against **GOD**.

They are indeed penitent so far as to be troubled at themselves for what they have done; but this trouble works no change and alteration in them; they still hate **GOD** who inflicts these punishments upon them, and who they believe is determined to continue them in this miserable state. The present anguish of their condition, and their despair of bettering it, makes them mad; and their minds are so distracted by the wildness of their passions, and

their spirits so exasperated and set on fire by their S E R M.
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own giddy motions, that there can be no rest and
silence in their souls not so much as the liberty of
one calm and sedate thought.

Or if at any time they reflect upon the evil of
their sins, and should entertain any thoughts of re-
turning to G O D and their duty, they are presently
checkt with this consideration, that their case is de-
termined, that G O D is implacably offended with
them, and is inexorably and peremptorily resolved
to make them miserable for ever; and during this
persuasion, no man can return to the love of G O D
and goodness, without which there can be no re-
pentance.

This consideration, of the immutable state of
men after this life, should engage us with all se-
riousness and diligence to endeavour to secure our
future happiness. G O D hath "set before us good
"and evil, life and death," and we may yet choose
which we please; but in the other world, we must
stand to that choice which we have made here, and
inherit the consequences of it.

By sin mankind is brought into a miserable state;
but our condition is not desperate and past remedy.
G O D hath sent his S O N "to be a P R I N C E and
"a S A V I O U R, to give repentance and remission of
"sins." So that tho' our case be bad, it need not
continue so, if it be not our own fault. There is a
possibility now of changing our condition for the
better, and of laying the foundation of a perpetual
happiness for our selves. The grace of G O D calls
upon us, and is ready to assist us; so that no man's
case is so bad, but there is a possibility of bettering
it, if we be not wanting to our selves, and will make

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use of the grace which GOD offers, who is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. Under the influence and assistance of this grace, those who are "dead in trespasses and sins, may pass from "death to life," may be "turned from darkness "to light, and from the power of Satan unto "GOD." So long as we are in this world there is a possibility of being translated from one state to another, from the "dominion of Satan into the "kingdom of GOD's dear SON." But if we neglect the opportunities of this life, and stand out against the offers of GOD's grace and mercy, there will no overtures be made to us in the other world. After this life is ended, GOD will try us no more; our final miscarriage in this world will prove fatal to us in the other, and we shall not be permitted to live over again to correct our errors. "As the tree falls, so it shall lie;" such a state as we are settled in, when we go out of this world, shall be fixt in the other, and there will be no possibility of changing it. We are yet in the hand of our own counsel, and by GOD's grace we may mould and fashion our own fortune. But if we trifle away this advantage, we shall "fall into the "hands of the living GOD," out of which there is no redemption. GOD hath yet left heaven and hell to our choice, and we had need to look about us, and choose well, who can choose but once for all and for ever. There is yet a space and opportunity left us of repentance; but so soon as we step out of this life, and are entred upon the other world, our condition will be sealed, never to be revert. And because after this life there will be no further hope of mercy, there will be no possibility of repentance.

"This

"This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation; therefore to-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; lest God swear in his wrath that we shall not enter into his rest." I proceed to a

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Sixth observation, that a standing revelation of God is evidence sufficient for divine things. "They have Moses, and the prophets, let them hear them;" that is, they have the books of Moses and the prophets, written by men divinely inspired, these do sufficiently declare to them the will of God and their duty; and it is unreasonable to demand or expect that God should do more for their conviction and satisfaction.

I know very well the text speaks only of the scriptures of the old testament, those of the new being not then extant when this parable was delivered. But what is here said concerning the scriptures of the old testament, is equally applicable to the new; and tho' Abraham do only recommend Moses and the prophets, there is no doubt but he would have said the same concerning CHRIST and his apostles, if the books of the new testament had been then extant. So that what I shall say upon this observation, does indifferently concern the whole scripture.

And that I may make out this observation more fully, I shall take these five things into consideration.

1st, what we are to understand by a divine revelation.

2dly, give a brief account of the several kinds of it,

3dly, shew

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3dly, shew what advantage this standing revelation of the scriptures hath above any other way of conveying the will of God to the world.

4thly, that there is sufficient evidence for the divinity of the scriptures.

5thly, that it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for our conviction, than to afford such a standing revelation of his mind and will. I shall go over these as briefly as I can. I begin with the

1st, what we are to understand by a divine revelation. By a divine revelation we are to understand "a supernatural discovery, or manifestation of any thing to us;" I say, "supernatural," because it may either be immediately by God; or by the mediation of angels, as most, if not all the revelations of the old testament were. "A supernatural discovery or manifestation," either immediately to our minds, by our understandings and inward faculties; (for I do not so well understand the distinction between understanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it,) or else mediately to our understandings by the mediation of our outward senses, as by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and sound to the sense of hearing. "A discovery or manifestation of a thing," whether it be such as cannot be known at all by the use of our natural reason and understandings; or such as may be discovered by natural light, but is more clearly revealed or made known, or we are awakened to a more particular and attentive consideration of it. For it is not at all unsuitable to the wisdom of God, to make a supernatural discovery to us of such things as may

be known by the light of nature, either to give us a clearer manifestation of such truths as were more obscurely known, and did as it were lie buried in our understandings; or else to quicken our minds to a more serious and lively consideration of those truths.

2dly, for the several kinds of divine revelations. That they were various, the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, chap. i. 1. "GOD who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the prophets;" where by prophets we are to understand not only those who did foretell future things; but any person that was divinely inspired, and to whom GOD was pleased to make any supernatural discovery of himself.

Now the several kinds of revelation taken notice of by the Jews, are visions; dreams; prophecy; oracle; inspiration, or that which we call the HOLY GHOST; voice *Bath-col*; or that which was the highest of all, which they call *gradus Mosaicus*, the degree of revelation which was peculiar to Moses. The Jewish writers, especially Maimonides, have many subtle observations about the differences of these several kinds of revelation, which depend upon subtle and philosophical distinctions of the faculties of perception; as that some of these revelations were by impression only upon the understanding; some only upon the imagination; some upon both; some upon the outward senses; but the simple and plain difference between them, so far as there is any ground in scripture to distinguish them, seems to be this; vision was a representation of something to a man, when he was waking, in opposition to dreams, which were representations made to men in

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in their sleep. Prophecy might be either dream or vision, and the Jews observe that it was always one of these two ways, which they grounded upon Numb. xii. 6. "If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream." But prophecy in the strict notion of it, had this peculiarly belonging to it, that it was not only monitory or instructive, but did foretel some event of concernment to others; and the Jewish doctors tell us, that it was a clearer revelation, and carried a greater assurance along with it, and that this was common to all the three, that there was something of extasy and transport of mind in all these.

The fourth sort of revelation, which was by oracle, which is call'd Urim and Thummim, was a rendering of answers to questions, by the high-priest looking upon the stones in the breast-plate, which how it was done, is uncertain.

The fifth sort of revelation is that which they call the HOLY GHOST, which was a more calm and gentle inspiration, without any extraordinary transport of mind or extasy; such as David had in the writing of the psalms.

The lowest of all was that which they call'd *Bath-col*, which was by a voice from heaven; and this is the way of revelation, which the Jews observed did only continue among them from the days of the prophet Malachi to our SAVIOUR.

The highest of all was that which they call'd *gradus Mosaicus*, to which the Jews give several prerogatives above all the other ways of revelation;

as that is was done by impressiⁿ merely upon the understanding, without extasy, or rapture, or transport, when he was waking, and in his ordinary temper, and his senses not bound up either by extasy or sleep, that it was a revelation immediately from God himself, and not by the mediation of angels, without any fear, or amazement, or fainting, which was incident to other prophets; and the spirit of prophecy rested upon him, and he could exert it arbitrarily, and put it forth when he would. Of which thus much is evidently true from the story of him, that the spirit of prophecy did rest more constantly upon him, and that he could exert it with greater freedom, and without any discernible amazement or transport from his ordinary temper. But that it was by impressiⁿ merely upon his understanding, as that is a distinct faculty from the imagination, is not so certain: that it was always by an immediate communication from God, without the mediation of angels, seems not to be true; for St. Stephen tells us, that "the law was given by the disposition of angels," Acts vii. 53. And St. Paul that "it was ordained by the angels in the hand of a mediator," that is Moses, Gal. iii. 19. But that the revelation which was made to him, had some singular prerogatives above those of other prophets, is plain from scripture, Numb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 8. when Aaron and Miriam contended with Moses as being equal to him, God tells them that there was a vast difference between him and other prophets; "hear now my words, if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant

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 CXXVII. " to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark
 " speeches, &c." Exod. xxxiii. 11. " And the
 " LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man
 " speaketh unto his friend." Deut. xxxiv. 10.
 " And there arose not a prophet since in Israel
 " like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to
 " face." All which signify at least this, that God
 made the clearest, and most familiar, and most per-
 fect discoveries to Moses of any of the prophets;
 only our LORD JESUS CHRIST, by whom God
 hath discovered his will to us under the new testa-
 ment, did excel Moses; Moses being but " a faith-
 " ful servant," that is, *humilis amicus*, a meaner
 sort of friend; but " the LORD JESUS CHRIST
 " the only begotten SON of GOD," who came from
 " the bosom of his FATHER," and was intimately
 acquainted with the secrets of his will, and " had
 " not the SPIRIT given him by measure," but
 the most plentiful effusion of it, being " anointed
 " above his fellows."

Now these being the several sorts and degrees of
 revelation, which GOD hath made of himself to
 the world, the holy scriptures are a system or col-
 lection of these, the authentick instruments or record
 by which the things revealed any of these ways, are
 transmitted to us, and is therefore called " the
 " word of GOD," as containing those things which
 GOD in several ages hath spoken to the world;
 that is, matters of divine revelation, which are ne-
 cessary to be known by men, in order to their eter-
 nal happiness. And this being now the great and
 standing revelation of GOD, which is to con-
 tinue to the end of the world, I intend to limi-

my discourse solely to this, as being the only re-
velation which we are concerned to enquire after.

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And therefore in the third place, to shew you what advantage this standing revelation of the scriptures hath above private revelations made to particular persons, and frequently repeated and renewed in several ages; that so it may appear both agreeable to the wisdom of GOD to settle revelations in this way, as being more commodious; and likewise to his goodness, it being a real privilege which these latter ages of the world enjoy, that they have a more fixt and certain way of being acquainted with the will of GOD, than those ages had, which were govern'd by such private revelations, as were now and then made to particular persons. And the advantages are these.

1. It is a most certain way of conveyance of things, and more secure and free from imposture. Suppose a revelation made to a particular person, which is of general concernment, that this may have a general and lasting effect, he must impart it to others, as many as he can, and give them the best assurance he can of it; and these must relate it to others; and so it must pass from hand to hand, to be delivered from parents to their children. Now this way of conveying a revelation by oral report, must needs be liable to many uncertainties, both by involuntary mistakes, through weakness of memory or understanding; and wilful falsifications and impostures, out of malice and design. So that the effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be large nor lasting, it can but reach a few persons, and continue a little while in its full credibility; and the farther it goes, the weaker, like

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circles made in water, which the more they enlarge themselves, and the longer they continue the less discernible they are, 'till at length they quite disappear. Whereas being once recorded by persons secured from error by supernatural and divine assistance, they are not liable to those easy falsifications or mistakes, which traditional reports and relations are necessarily, thro' human malice or weakness, liable to.

2. It is a more general and universal way of conveyance; which is evident from the common experience of the world, who have pitched upon this way of writing things in books, as that which doth most easily convey the knowledge and notice of things to the generality of men.

3. It is a more uniform way of conveyance; that is, things that are once written and propagated that way, lie equally open to all, and come in a manner with equal credit to all; it being not morally impossible that a common book, that passeth through all hands, and which is of vast importance and concernment, should be liable to any material corruption, without a general conspiracy and agreement, which cannot be, but that it must be generally known. So that considering the commonness, and universal concernment of this book of the scriptures, all men are in a manner equally, that is, every man is sufficiently and competently assured of the credit of it; that is, that we are not in any material thing imposed upon by false copies. But in traditional revelation it is quite otherwise; tradition being a very unequal and ununiform way of conveyance. For seeing it may be of general concernment, and all cannot have it at the first hand, that is, immediately from him

to whom it was made; but some at the second, SERM. CXXVII.
others at the third, fourth, or fifth hand, or much
further off; the credit of it will be necessarily weak-
ned by every remove. A report that comes through
many hands, being like the argument we call in-
duction; and as the strength and goodness of that
depends upon the truth of every one of those in-
stances that make it up, so that if any of them fail,
the whole argument is naught; so the credit of a
report that passeth through twenty hands, depends
upon the integrity and sufficiency of all the relators,
and whatever there is either of falshood and malice,
or of incapacity of understanding, or frailty of me-
mory in any of the relators, so much of weakness is
derived into the report or testimony; and conse-
quently the assurance which we can have of a pri-
vate revelation, which is deliver'd traditionally
through a great many persons, must needs be very
unequal.

4. It is a more lasting way of conveyance. Which
likewise appears by experience, we having now no-
thing at all of the history of ancient times, but what
is conveyed down to us in writing.

5. It is a more humane way of conveyance, which
requires less of miracle and supernatural interposi-
tion for the preservation of it. This book of the
scriptures may with ordinary humane care be trans-
mitted intire, and free from any material error, to
all succeeding ages: but revelations unwritten, if
they have any lasting and considerable effect, they
must at least in every age be renewed and repeated;
otherwise in a very short space, either through the
unfaithfulness, or carelessness and frailty of men,
they

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they will either be quite lost, or so corrupted and depraved, that they will signify nothing.

From all which it appears, that we have so little cause to murmur and repine at the providence of GOD, which in these latter ages of the world does not make those more immediate discoveries and manifestations of himself to us, that he did to former ages, that we have rather great reason to admire the wisdom and goodness of GOD's providence, which hath privileged us with this standing revelation of his written word, which hath so many ways the advantage of frequent and extraordinary revelation, and in respect of the generality of mankind, is much more useful and effectual to its end. I know there are some that have endeavour'd to persuade the world, that doctrines may much better be preserved by common rumour and report, than by writing and record; but I hope there is no man so destitute of common sense as to believe them contrary to the experience of all men.

I come now to the fourth thing I propos'd to be consider'd; namely, that there is sufficient evidence of the divinity of the scriptures. By the divinity of the scriptures, I mean, that they were revealed by GOD, and that the things contained in them were not invented by men, but discovered to men by GOD; and that the penmen of these books did not write their own private conceptions, but were inspired by the HOLY GHOST. Now if we can be satisfy'd of this, we ought to receive the scriptures with the same reverence, as if an angel from heaven should declare these things unto us, or as if GOD should immediately reveal them

to our minds; for nothing can come with greater ^{S E R M:} authority than this, that we believe it to be revealed ^{CXXVII.} by G O D; and provided we be assured of this, it matters not which way; the thing hath the same authority.

Now that we have sufficient evidence of the divinity of the scriptures, will best appear, by considering what is sufficient to give authority to a book, so that no prudent or reasonable man can question, but that the book was writ by him whose name it bears. For what evidence we would accept of for the authority of other books, we must not refuse in this case for the scriptures; if we do, we deal unequally, and it is a sign that we do not want evidence for the authority of the scriptures, but that we have no mind to believe them.

Now the utmost authority that any book is capable of, is, that it hath been transmitted down to us by the general and uncontroll'd testimony of all ages, and that the authority of it was never questioned in that age wherein it was written, nor invalidated ever since.

And this evidence we have for the authority of the scriptures. As for the old testament, I shall not now labour in the proof of that by arguments proper to it self, but shall take the divinity of them upon the authority of the new, which, if it be proved, is sufficient evidence for it, tho' there were no other.

Now for the scriptures of the new testament, I desire but these two things to be granted to me at first.

1. That all were written by those persons, whose names they bear: and for this we have as much authority

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authority as for any books in the world, and so much as may satisfy men in other cases, and therefore not to be rejected in this.

2. That those who wrote those books were men of integrity, and did not wilfully falsify in any thing; and this cannot reasonably be denied, because these very persons gave the utmost evidence that men could give of their integrity. The highest attestation that any man can give of the truth of what he relates, is to lay down his life for the testimony of it; and this the apostles did.

Now if this be granted, that they did not falsify in their relations concerning the miracles of CHRIST, and his resurrection, and the miraculous gifts which were bestowed upon the apostles after his ascension; this is as great an evidence as the world can give, and as the thing is capable of, that our SAVIOUR was "a teacher come from GOD," and that the apostles were extraordinarily assisted by the HOLY GHOST; and if this be granted, what can be desired more to prove the divinity of their writings?

But it may be said, that tho' the apostles were granted to be men of integrity, and that they did not wilfully falsify in their relations, yet they might be mistaken about those matters. But that they were not, we have as much evidence as can be for any thing of this nature, namely, that the things which are related are plain sensible matters of fact, about which no man need mistake, unless he will; and they did not write things upon the report of others, who might possibly have designs to deceive, but upon the surest evidence in the world, their own knowledge, and the testimony of their senses.

" the

“ the things that we have seen and heard testify we
“ unto you.” So that if they were mistaken in these
things, no man can be sure of any thing ; and by
the same reason that we disbelieve the authority of
the scriptures upon this account, we must believe
nothing at all. This is in short the whole force of
the argument for the divinity of the scriptures, which
I might have enlarged infinitely upon ; but I design
now only briefly to represent to you, that we, who
live at the distance of so many ages from the time of
this revelation, are not destitute of sufficient evi-
dence for the authority of the scriptures, and such
evidence, as they who reject in other cases, are
esteemed unreasonable.

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I should come now to the
5th, and last thing, namely, that it is unreasonable
to expect, that GOD should do more for our con-
viction, than to afford us a standing revelation of
his mind and will, such as the books of the holy
scriptures are. But this I shall refer to another op-
portunity, in a particular discourse upon the 31st
verse, which contains the main design, the sum,
and substance of this whole parable.

S E R M O N CXXVIII.

The parable of the rich man, and
Lazarus.

L U K E xvi. 31.

*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will
they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

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The third
sermon on
this text.
Preach'd
at white-
hall, anno
1678.

TH E S E words are the conclusion of the excellent parable of our SAVIOUR concerning the rich man and Lazarus, and they are the final answer which Abraham gives to the rich man's last request; who being in great torment, and not able to obtain any ease for himself is represented as concerned for his relations, whom he had left behind him upon earth; lest they also by their own carelessness and folly should plunge themselves into the same misery that he was in, and therefore he begs of Abraham, that he would "send Lazarus to his father's house," where he had "five brethren, that he might testify unto them lest they also should come to that place of torment." To which request Abraham answers that there was no necessity of such an extraordinary course to be used towards those who had sufficient means of conviction so near at hand, if they would but hearken to them, and make use of them. "Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."

But the rich man presseth his request further upon this reason, that they might not perhaps be

move

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removed by Moses and the prophets, nay it was ^{S E R M.}
likely they would not be moved by them; for they ^{CXXVIII}

had always had them, and yet they remained impenitent: but if a special messenger should be sent to them from the dead, this certainly could not fail to awaken them, and bring them to repentance, ver. 30. "And he said, nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." To which Abraham makes this peremptory reply, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead."

In which words Abraham absolutely denies that there is any such probability, much less certainty that those who reject a publick credible revelation of God, such as that of the holy scripture is, should be effectually convinced by a messenger from the dead. And our SAVIOUR brings in Abraham delivering himself very positively in this matter, and therefore we may presume it to be our SAVIOUR'S own sense, and may rely upon it for a truth; which however at first sight it may not be so evident, yet I hope in the progress of this discourse to make it sufficiently clear.

But before I undertake that, I shall premise a caution or two to prevent all mistake in this matter.

First, that we are not to understand these words too strictly and rigorously, as if the thing were simply and in it self impossible, that a man who is not convinced by hearing or reading Moses and the prophets, should be brought to repentance any other way. For it is very possible in the nature of the thing, yea, and likely enough, that a man who is

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not convinced by calm evidence and persuasion, may yet be very much wrought upon by a strange and amazing accident; and if one, whom he had known when he was alive, should appear to him from the dead, and declare the certainty of a future state, and the condition of things in another world, there is little doubt to be made, but that this would more rouse and awaken him to consider his danger, than all the threatnings of GOD's word; and 'tis very possible that by the concurrence of GOD's grace, this might prove an effectual means to convince such a man, and to bring him to repentance. And yet for all this, it is not probable upon the whole matter, and if all circumstances be duly considered, that this should generally have a permanent effect upon men, so as thoroughly to reclaim such persons as do obstinately resist the light and counsel of GOD's word.

Secondly, another caution I would give is this, that we are not to understand these words so, as to weaken the force of that argument from miracles for the proof and confirmation of a divine doctrine, as if our SAVIOUR intended to insinuate that miracles are not a proper and sufficient argument to convince men. For our SAVIOUR does not here oppose Moses and the prophets to a miraculous testimony; but he advanceth the publick evidence and testimony which Moses and the prophets had above the evidence of a single and private miracle; for Moses and the prophets had their confirmation from miracles; and miracles are the great evidence and attestation which GOD hath always given to the divinity of any person or doctrine; and therefore Abraham cannot be thought

to speak any thing to the prejudice of miracles, SERM. CXXVIII
when he says, "if they hear not Moses and the
" prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho'
" one rose from the dead." Nay, so far is he
from that, that this reasoning of his is rather for
the advantage of miracles. For Moses and the
prophets had the confirmation of many and great,
of publick and unquestionable miracles; a credible
relation whereof was conveyed down to after-ages.
So that if rational means of conviction were the
thing desired, it was not likely that those, who
were not persuaded by Moses and the prophets,
which were acknowledged by themselves to have had
the confirmation of so many undoubted miracles,
should in reason be convinced by a private and single
miracle.

These considerations being premised by way of
caution, I come now to make out the truth of what
is here asserted in the text. And for the full clear-
ing of this matter, I shall speak to these two pro-
positions.

First, That it is unreasonable to expect that GOD
should do more for the conviction of men, than to
afford them a standing revelation of his mind and
will; such as that of the holy scriptures is. And if
so, then

Secondly, that upon the whole matter it is very
improbable, that those who reject this publick reve-
lation of GOD, should be effectually convinced, tho'
one should speak to them from the dead.

First, that it is unreasonable to expect that GOD
should do more for the conviction of men, than to
afford them a standing revelation of his mind and
will; such as that of the holy scriptures is. This is
strongly

SERM. CXXVIII. strongly implied in Abraham's first answer, "they have Moses, and the prophets, let them hear them;" as if he had said, having such means of conviction so near at hand, why should they desire and expect any other? It is in this case of the scriptures, as in that of GOD's providence; GOD does not commonly prove his providence to men by extraordinary instances of his power, and by changing the course of nature, to convince every man in the world that he governs it: but by standing testimonies of his wisdom and power, and goodness; by these GOD does sufficiently satisfy considerate men of his government and care of the world; and tho' he do seldom manifest himself in supernatural and extraordinary ways, yet he hath not left himself without a witness, by the constant course of nature, in the returns of day and night, in the revolutions of the seasons of the year, "in that he gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." and these standing arguments of his providence, tho' they be not so much taken notice of because they are so common, yet they are daily miracles, and we can hardly imagine greater, and we should be strangely amazed at them, but that they are so very frequent and familiar.

The case is the same as to divine revelation. GOD hath not thought fit to gratify the perverse curiosity of men, by affording to every man a particular and immediate revelation of his mind and will: but he hath given us a standing revelation, which at first had the greatest and most miraculous confirmation, and he hath still left us sufficient means of being assured of the truth of this revelation, and of the confirmation that was at the first

first given to it; and we tempt GOD, by demand-SERM.
ing extraordinary signs, when we may receive so CXXVIII
abundant satisfaction in an ordinary way. This being
admitted, I shall proceed in the

Second place to shew, that it is upon the whole matter, and all circumstances consider'd, very improbable, that those who reject this publick revelation from GOD, should be effectually convinced, tho' one should speak to them from the dead. And this is that which is expressly asserted here in the text, "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead." Not but that any man would be very much startled and amazed, if one should come from the dead to warn him out of the danger of his wicked life; but yet for all that it is very unlikely that they who obstinately and perversely refuse to be convinced by Moses and the prophets, would be effectually persuaded (that is, so as to be brought to repentance and reformation of their lives) "tho' one should rise from the dead." And that for these reasons.

1. Because if such miracles were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all.

2. Men have as great or greater reason to believe the threatnings of GOD's word, as the discourse of one that should speak to them from the dead.

3. The very same reason which makes men to reject the counsels of GOD in his word, would in all probability hinder them from being convinced by a particular miracle.

4. Ex-

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4. Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince those who are obstinately addicted and wedded to their lusts.

5. An effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of GOD, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of GOD's grace, which there is no reason to expect either in an extraordinary way, or in an extraordinary degree, after men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means which GOD hath appointed to that end.

1. If such miracles as a special messenger from the dead to warn and admonish men, were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect upon men, and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all. For it is unreasonable at first sight, that the worst and most obstinate sort of sinners should expect this, as a peculiar favour and privilege to themselves, and that GOD should not do as much for others, who have deserved it more, and would probably make better use of it; and if these things were common, it is very probable that men would not be much moved by them. It may be while the apprehension of such a thing were fresh upon them, they would take up some good resolutions; as sinners usually do, while they are under present convictions of conscience, and the hand of GOD, by some great affliction or sickness, lies heavy upon them: but still they would be apt to defer their repentance, and put it off 'till the present amazement were a little over, and the terror of their

their first apprehensions were abated and worn off by degrees, and after a little while they would return to their former course. And this is too probable, from what we see men do in other cases not very much remote from this. It is a very terrible and amazing thing to see a man die, and solemnly take his last leave of the world. The very circumstances of dying men are apt to strike us with horror: to hear such a man how sensibly he will speak of the other world, as if he were just come from it, rather than going to it; how severely he will condemn himself for the folly and wickedness of his life; with what passion he will wish that he had lived better, and served God more sincerely; how seriously he will resolve upon a better life, if God would be pleased to raise him up, and try him but once more; with what zeal and earnestness he will commend to his best friends and nearest relations a religious and virtuous course of life, as the only thing that will minister comfort to them when they come to be in his condition. Such discourses as these are very apt to move and affect men for the time, and to stir up in them very good resolutions, whilst the present fit and impression lasts: but because these sights are very frequent, they have seldom any great and permanent effect upon men. Men consider that it is a very common case, and sinners take example and encouragement from one another; every one is affected for the present, but few are so effectually convinced, as to betake themselves to a better course.

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And if apparitions from the dead were as common as it is for men to die, we may reasonably presume that the discourses of dead and dying, of those that are going, and those who come from the dead, would have much the same effect upon the generality of men.

But if we suppose this a singular case, (which there is no reason to do) in that case the effect would probably be this; a man that were strongly addicted to his lusts, and had no mind to leave them, would be apt when the fright was over, to be easily persuaded that all this was merely the work of fancy and imagination; and the rather, because such things did not happen to others as well as to himself.

2. We have as great or greater reason to believe the warnings or threatnings of GOD's word, as the discourses of one that should come to us from the dead. For the threatnings of GOD's word against such sins as natural light convinceth men of, have the natural guilt and fears of men on their side, the particular testimony of every man's conscience, and the concurrent testimony of mankind to the probability of the thing; and to give us full assurance of the truth and reality of them, we have a credible relation of great and unquestionable miracles wrought on purpose to give testimony to those persons who denounced those threatnings, that they came from GOD. So that here is a very publick and authentick testimony given to the threatnings of GOD's word, more suitable to the generality of mankind, and of greater authority than a private apparition,

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parition, or a single miracle; and if that will not convince men, why should we suppose that this will? S E R M.
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3. The very same reason which makes men to "reject the counsels of GOD" in his word, would, in all probability, hinder men from being convinced by an apparition from the dead. It is not generally for want of evidence, that men do not yield a full and effectual assent to the truth of GOD's word, I mean, that they do not believe it so as to obey it; but from the interest of some lust. The true cause is not in mens understandings, and because there is not reason enough to satisfy them, that the scriptures are the word of GOD: but in the obstinacy of their wills, which are enslaved to their lusts. And the disease being there, it is not to be cured by more evidence, but by more consideration, and by the grace of GOD, and better resolutions.

The man is addicted to some vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain those truths which would check and controul him in his course. The light of GOD's word is offensive to him, and therefore he would shut it out. This account our blessed SAVIOUR gives of the enmity of the Jews against him and his doctrine, John iii. 19. "Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." Upon the same account it is, that men resist the doctrine of the holy scriptures; not because they have suffici-

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ent reason to doubt of their divine authority ; but because they are unwilling to be govern'd by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book : for the wills of men have a great influence upon their understandings, to make assent easy or difficult ; and as many are apt to assent to what they have a mind to, so they are slow to believe any thing which crosseth their humours and inclinations ; so that tho' greater evidence were offer'd, it is likely it would not prevail with them, because the matter does not stick there. Their wills are distemper'd, " men hate to be reform'd," and this makes them " cast the laws of GOD behind their backs;" and if GOD himself should speak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of Israel, yet for all that, they might continue " a stiff-necked and rebellious people." Tho' the evidence were such as their understandings could not resist ; yet their wills might still hold out, and the present condition of their minds might have no lasting influence upon their hearts and lives ; such a violent conviction might affect them for the present, but the sense of it might perhaps wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardness. Men by a long and obstinate continuance in sin, may bring themselves to the temper and disposition of devils ; who though " they believe and tremble " at the thoughts of God and his threatnings, yet they are wicked still ; for so long as men retain a strong affection for their lusts, they will break through all conviction, and what evidence soever be offer'd to them, they will

will find some way or other to avoid it, and to delude themselves. The plain truth of the case is this, (if men will honestly speak their consciences, they cannot deny it) they do not call for more evidence, either because they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it; but that they may seem to have some excuse for themselves, for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4thly, experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and such as are obstinately addicted to their lusts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the history of the bible. What wonders were wrought in the sight of Pharaoh and the Egyptians! yet they were harden'd under all these plagues. Balaam, who "greedily followed the wages of unrighteousness," was not to be stopt by the admonition of an angel. The Jews, after so many miracles which their eyes had seen, continued to be a "stiff-necked and gain-saying people;" so that it is hard to say which was more prodigious, the wonders which God wrought for them, or their rebellions against him; and when "in the fulness of time," the Son of God came, and did among them "the works which never man did," such, as one would have thought might have brought the worst people in the world to repentance, those of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet they repented not. Yea the very thing which the rich man here in my text requested of Abraham for his brethren, was done among them; Lazarus did
rise

rise from the dead, and testified unto them, and they were not persuaded.

And which is yet more, our SAVIOUR himself, according to his own prediction while he was alive, “rose again from the dead the third day,” and was visibly taken up into heaven; and yet how few among them did “believe, and give glory to GOD?” so that we see the very things here spoken of in the text, made good in a famous instance; they who “believed not Moses and the prophets,” which testified of the MESSIAH, were “not persuaded when he rose from the dead.”

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of GOD have had upon those who were not reclaimed by his word? It is not long since GOD shewed himself among us, by “terrible things in righteousness,” and visited us with three of his sorest judgments, war, and pestilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedness and impiety still reign and rage among us; it is a very sad consideration to see how little those who have outlived the plagues, have been reformed by them; “we have not return’d to the LORD, nor sought him for all this.”

I may appeal to the experience of particular persons. How frequently do we see men, after great afflictions, and tedious sufferings, and dangerous sicknesses, return to their former evil courses! and tho’ they have been upon the brink of eternity, and “the terrors of death have compass’d them about, and the pains of hell have almost taken

“hold

“hold of them,” tho’ they have had as lively and sensible convictions of another world, as if they had spoken with those that had come from thence, or even been there themselves; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery, have been as mad, as furious sinners as they were before; so that it ought to be no such wonder to us, which the text tells us, that “if men hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Especially, if we consider in the

5th and last place, that an effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of GOD, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by GOD for that end. To be effectually persuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the assistance of GOD’s grace, and there is little reason to expect that GOD will afford his grace to those who reject and despise the counsels of his word. The doctrine of salvation contain’d in the holy scriptures, and the promises and threatnings of GOD’s word, are the ordinary means which GOD hath appointed for the conversion of men, and to bring them to repentance; and if we sincerely use these means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of GOD’s grace to make them effectual; but if we neglect and resist these means, in confidence that GOD should attempt

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tempt our recovery by some extraordinary ways; though he should gratify our presumptuous and unreasonable curiosity, so far as to send “one from the dead to testify unto us:” yet we have no reason to expect the assistance of his grace, to make such a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have so long despised his word, and resisted his SPIRIT, which are “the power of God unto salvation.”

Without his grace and assistance, the most probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures; “by grace we are saved, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.” This grace is revealed to us in the gospel; and the assistances of it are conveyed to us by the gospel; and it is great presumption to promise to ourselves the assistance of God’s grace in any other way than he hath been pleased to promise it to us.

And thus I have shewn you, as briefly and plainly as I could, how unlikely it is, that those who obstinately reject a clear and publick revelation of God, should be effectually convinced and brought to repentance by any apparitions from the dead.

I shall only make two or three inferences from this discourse which I have made, and so conclude.

1st, since the scriptures are the publick and standing revelation of God’s will to men, and the ordinary means of salvation, we may hence conclude, that people ought to have them in such a language as they can understand. This our SAVIOUR plainly supposeth in the discourse which

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he represents between Abraham and the rich man; SERM.
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desiring that Lazarus might be sent from the dead
“to his brethren, to testify unto them;” to which
request Abraham would not have given this answer
and advice, “they have Moses and the prophets,
“let them hear them,” had he supposed that the
scriptures then were or for the future ought to
be lockt up from the people in an unknown
tongue; for the rich man might very well have
replied, “nay, father Abraham,” but they are
not permitted to have “Moses and the prophets”
in such a language as they can understand; and
therefore there is more need why “one should be
“sent from the dead to testify unto them.”

Nor would Abraham have said again, “if they
“hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will
“they be persuaded.” For how should men hear
what they cannot understand, so as to be persuaded
by it?

It is evident then, that our SAVIOUR, accord-
ing to the reasoning of this parable, takes it for
granted, that the holy scriptures are the standing
and ordinary means of bringing men to faith and
repentance, and that the people are to have the free
use of them. But since our SAVIOUR's time,
the church of Rome hath found a mighty incon-
venience in this, and therefore hath taken the scrip-
tures out of the hands of the people. They will
not now let them “have Moses and the prophets,”
the gospel of our blessed SAVIOUR, and the writings
of his apostles, because they are really afraid they
should “hear them,” and by hearing of them, be con-
vinced and persuaded of the errors and corruptions

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of their church; but instead of the scriptures of the old and new testament, they have put into their hands a legend of famous apparitions of "men from the dead, testifying unto them" concerning purgatory and transubstantiation, and the worship of the blessed virgin and the saints, and the great benefit and refreshment which souls in purgatory have by the indulgences of the pope, and the prayers of the living put up to saints and angels on their behalf; so that in the church of Rome, quite contrary to our SAVIOUR'S method, men are persuaded of their religion, of their new articles of faith, and ways of worship, not by Moses and the prophets, not by the doctrine of the holy scriptures (for they every where testify against them) but by absurd romances, and ill-contriv'd fictions of apparitions from the dead. I will dismiss this matter with this one observation, that however interested and confident men may set a bold face upon any thing, yet it cannot to considerate men but seem a very hard case, that there should be no salvation to be had out of the church of Rome; and yet the ordinary, and (in our SAVIOUR'S judgment) the most effectual means of salvation are not to be had in it.

But I pass from this, to that which does more immediately concern our practice.

2dly, let us hear and obey that publick revelation of GOD'S will, which in so much mercy to mankind, he hath been pleased to afford us. This is an inestimable privilege and advantage which the world in many ages was destitute of, having no other guide to conduct them to eternal happiness but the light of nature, and some particular revelations,

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tions, which now and then GOD was pleased to make of his will to men: but now GOD hath set up a great and standing light in the world, the doctrines of the holy scriptures; and by the gospel of his blessed SON, hath "given the knowledge of "salvation to all men, for the remission of their "sins, through the tender mercies of GOD, where- "by the day-spring from on high hath visited us, "to give light to them that sit in darkness, and "in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet "into the way of peace," to convince us of the error of our ways, and to direct us in our duty. "We, upon whom the ends of the world are "come," do enjoy all the advantages of divine revelation which the world ever had, and as great as the world ever shall have. "GOD in these last "days hath spoken unto us by his SON," and if we will not hear him, GOD will employ no other extraordinary prophet and messenger to us. "If "the wrath of GOD so clearly revealed from heaven by the gospel of our blessed SAVIOUR, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of "men;" if the terror of the great day, and the fear of eternal torment; if the dreadful sufferings of the SON of GOD for our sins, and the merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and the glorious hopes of eternal life and happiness will not prevail with us to leave our sins, and to amend our lives, we have no reason to expect that GOD should use any farther means to reclaim us; that he should ever make any more attempts for our recovery. And therefore,

3dly, and lastly, those who are not brought to repentance, and effectually persuaded by this clear and publick revelation which GOD hath made of his will to men in the holy scriptures, have reason to look upon their case as desperate.

Methinks it should not be a desirable thing to any of us to be convinced by an apparition, the thing is so dreadful and full of terror ; besides, that it argues men to be strangely hardened in a bad course, and obstinately bent upon their evil ways, when nothing will affright them from their sins, but what will almost put them out of their wits ; when nothing will keep them from running into hell, but a fearful and ghastly messenger from thence. What a terrible sight would it be to any of us, to meet one of our companions, whom we had lately known in this world, fresh come out of those flames, with the smell of fire and brimstone upon him ! what imagination can paint to it self the dread and horror of such a spectacle ! the rich man here in the parable, when he was in hell, is represented as sensible of the inconvenience of this, and therefore he did not desire to be sent himself to his brethren, but desired that Lazarus might go and testify unto them : he was apprehensive how frightful a sight he himself must needs have been to them, and therefore he desires that they might have a gentle warning by one, who from out of Abraham's bosom had seen the miseries of the damned, but enjoyed the state of the blessed.

But let not us tempt GOD by any such unreasonable demand, who speaks to us every day by the plain declarations of his word, and hath of late

years

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years call'd so loudly upon us by the voice of his providence to repent and turn to him; by so many miracles of mercy and deliverance, as GOD hardly ever wrought for any prince and people, and by such terrible vollies of judgments, and full viols of wrath, as have seldom been poured out upon any nation. GOD speaks to you by his ministers, men like your selves (GOD knows, poor frail and sinful men) but we are sure, that when we call you to repentance, we deliver to you the will and pleasure, the counsels and commands of the great GOD, which (whatever account may be made of us) do certainly challenge your most awful attention and regard. And we are sensible that we are call'd to a very difficult and unpleasant work, to contend with the lusts and vices of men, to strive against the strong and impetuous streams of a wicked and perverse generation; and nothing in the world could move us to this unwelcome and grievous importunity, but a great and just sense of our own duty, and your danger. And if we will not take these warnings, why should we expect that GOD should vouchsafe to send an express messenger to us from the other world, to certify us how all things are there, and that not so much to help the weakness of our faith, as to humour the perverseness of our infidelity? and why should we imagine that this course would prove more effectual? "let us not deceive our selves," the same lusts which now detain men so strongly in impenitency and unbelief, would in all probability hurry them on to hell, tho' an angel from heaven should meet them in their way, to give a stop to them. This indeed might

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SERM. might startle us; but nothing is like to save us,
CXXVII if the word of GOD and his grace do not.

But are we in earnest, and would we “be persuaded
“if one should rise from the dead?” GOD hath
condescended thus far to us, there is “one risen
“from the dead to testify unto us,” JESUS the
SON of GOD, who “died for our sins, and rose
“again for our justification,” and is ascended into
heaven, and set down at the right hand of GOD,
to assure us of a blessed resurrection, and a glori-
ous immortality. And if this will not satisfy us,
GOD will gratify our curiosity no farther. If we
“will not believe him, whom GOD hath sent,”
and to convince us that he hath sent him, hath
“raised him up from the dead, we shall die in our
“sins,” and perish in our impenitency. God hath
in great mercy to mankind done that which is
abundantly sufficient to convince those who are of
a teachable temper and disposition: but in great
wisdom and justice he hath not thought fit to pro-
vide any remedy for the wilful obstinacy and in-
tractable perverseness of men.

Now GOD, who hath the hearts of all men in
his hands, persuades us all, “to break off our sins
“by repentance, and to give glory to GOD,” be-
fore death and darkness come, and the day of our
final visitation overtake us, when we may perhaps
be surprized by a sudden stroke, or seized upon by a
violent disease, and may have no sense and ap-
prehension of our approaching danger; or if we
have, “may find no place for repentance, tho’
“we seek it with tears;” which GOD grant
may never happen to be the case of any of us,
for

for his mercy's sake in CHRIST JESUS, to whom with the FATHER, &c.

S E R M O N CXXIX.

The children of this world wiser than the children of light.

L U K E xvi. 8.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

THESE words are in the parable of the rich man's steward, who being called upon to give up his accounts, in order to his being discharged from his office, cast about with himself, what course he had best to take, to provide for his subsistence, when he should be turned out of his employment. At last he resolves upon this; that he will go to his LORD's debtors, and take a favourable account of them; and instead of "a hundred measures of oil, write down "fifty," and instead of "a hundred measures of "wheat, write down fourscore;" that by this means he might oblige them to be kind to him in his necessity. The lord hearing of this, commends the unjust steward, "because he had done wisely;" that is, he took notice of his dishonesty; but praised his shrewdness and sagacity, as having done prudently for himself, though he did not deal justly with

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Preached
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SERM. with him; and this is usual among men.
 CXXIX. When we see a man ingeniously bad, to commend his wit, and to say it is great pity he doth not use it better, and apply it to good purposes. Upon the whole, our SAVIOUR makes this observation; "that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light;" as if he had said, thus did the worldly wise man, thus provident was he for his future security and subsistence. He no sooner understands that he is to be turned out of his office, but he considers what provision to make for himself against that time. And is it not pity, that good men do not apply this wisdom to better and greater purposes? for is not every man such a steward, intrusted by GOD with the blessings of this life, and many opportunities of doing good? for all which, since he must shortly give an account, he ought in all reason so to use them, as thereby to provide for the happiness of another life, against this temporal life have an end.

And this is all the parallel intended in this parable, as we may see by our SAVIOUR's application of it. For parables are not to be stretched to an exact parallel in all the parts and circumstances of them; but only to be applied to the particular point and purpose intended. A parable, and the moral accommodation of it, being (as one well observes) not like two plains, which touch one another in every part; but like a globe upon a plain, which only toucheth in one point. Thus our SAVIOUR separates the wisdom of this steward from his injustice, and proposeth that to our imitation; "the children

“ children of this world are in their generation wiser
“ than the children of light.”

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The words are a comparison ; in which we have
1st, the persons compared, “ the children of this
“ world,” and the “ children of light.” It is a
very usual phrase among the Hebrews, when they
would express any thing to partake of such a na-
ture or quality, to call it the son or child of such a
thing. Thus good men are call’d “ the children of
“ God,” and bad men “ the children of the
“ devil ;” those who mind earthly things, and
make the things of this world their greatest aim and
design, are called “ the children of this world ;”
and those who are better enlightned with the know-
ledge of their own immortality, and the belief of a
future state after this life, are call’d “ the children
“ of light.”

2dly, here is the thing, wherein they are compa-
red, and that is, as to their wisdom and pru-
dence.

3dly, the object of this prudence, which is not
the same in both ; as if the sense were, “ the chil-
“ dren of this world are wiser than the children of
“ light,” as to the things of this world ; but here
are two several objects intended, about which the
prudence of these two sorts of persons is respectively
exercised ; the concernments of this world and the
other. And our SAVIOUR’S meaning is, that
“ the children of this world are wiser in their gene-
“ ration ;” that is, “ in their way, viz. as to the
interests and concernments of this world, “ than the
“ children of light are in theirs,” viz. as to the
interests and concernments of the other world.

4thly, here is a decision of the matter, and which of them it is that excels in point of prudence, in their way; and our SAVIOUR gives it to the “ children of this world; they are wiser in their generation, than the children of light.”

Now this proposition is not to be taken in the utmost strictness and rigor; as if it were universally true, and without any exception; as if no man had ever been so wise and provident for his soul, and the concernments of another world, as worldly men are for the interests and concernments of this life. For there are some that are fools at large, and imprudent in their whole conduct and management, both as to their affairs of this world, and the other; who are in too strict a sense, “ the children of this world.” They mind nothing but this world, and yet are grossly imprudent, even in their prosecution of their temporal interests: they neglect and forego all other worldly advantages, for the sake of a little sensual pleasure; and then they lose and destroy that too, by an over-hot and eager pursuit of it, and turn it at last into gall and wormwood. And there are others, (as St Paul for instance) who, I doubt not, have been as prudent and zealous, and industrious for the promoting of religion, and the salvation of themselves and others, as any man can be about the affairs of this present life; and I hope there are some such in every age, but GOD knows they are very few, and their wisdom and industry is seldom so equal, and constant, and uniform, as that of “ the men of this world.”

So that we are to understand this saying of our SAVIOUR's with the same allowance as we generally

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do all moral and proverbial speeches, that they are true for the most part, and the instances and exceptions to the contrary are very rare. It is seldom seen, that good men are so wise for the concernments of their souls, and of religion, as many worldly men are for their worldly interest.

In speaking to this proposition, I shall do these three things.

First, confirm and illustrate the truth of it, by considering the several parts and properties of wisdom.

Secondly, give some probable account of this, by considering what advantages "the children of" "this world have above the children of light."

Thirdly, I shall draw some inferences from the whole, by way of application.

First, I shall endeavour to confirm and illustrate the truth of this, by considering the several parts and properties of wisdom. Now this is wisdom, to mind and regard our chief end; and by all means to promote it; and this regard to our chief end doth express it self chiefly in these particulars; in our being firmly fixed and resolved upon it; in choosing the fittest means for the compassing and accomplishing of it; in a diligent use of those means; in an invincible constancy and perseverance in the prosecution of it; and in making all things to submit and to stoop to it. These are the principal parts and properties of wisdom; and I shall shew, that in all these "the children of this world" do usually excel "the children of light."

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1st, they are usually more firmly fixed and resolved upon their end. Whatever they set up for their end, riches, or honours, or pleasures, they are fixed upon it, and steady in the prosecution of it. If they set up for riches or honour, they neglect and despise pleasure, if it cross either of those ends. And this fixed resolution of the end is the great spring of action, and that which inspires men with vigour and diligence in the use of means; and the more resolved men are upon the end, the more active and industrious they will be in the use of means; for the end governs the means, and gives law and measure to our activity and industry in the use of them, and sweetens and allays the trouble and difficulty of them.

So that where the end is once firmly fixed and resolved upon, there will not be wanting fervour of prosecution; but if we be wavering and unsteady as to our end, this will weaken our hands, and quench the heat of our endeavours, and abate the heat of our endeavours, and abate the eagerness of our pursuit, and according to the degree of it, will derive a debility and inconstancy into all our motions. "The double-minded man (as St. James says) is unstable in all his ways." Now "the children of this world" are commonly more fixed and resolved upon their end, than "the children of light." 'Tis rare to see the whole life and actions of a good man, so constantly and uniformly conspiring to the furtherance of his great end, so directly tending to the salvation of his soul, and the increase of his glory and happiness in another world; as the actions of a worldly man, and the whole

whole course of his life do to the advancing of ^{S E R M}
his worldly interests. The covetous or ambitious ^{CXXIX.}
men seldom do any thing to the best of their
knowledge, that is impertinent to their end,
much less contrary to it; through every thing that
they do one may plainly see the end they aim
at, and that they are always true to it: whereas
the best men do many things, which are plainly
cross and contrary to their end, and a great many
more, which have no relation to it; and when
they mind it, it is rather by fits and starts, than in
any even course and tenour of actions.

And of this we have a famous instance in that
worldly and secular church, which now for several
hundred of years hath more steadily pursu'd the
end of secular greatness and dominion, than any
other church hath done to the ends of true religion,
the glory of **GOD**, and the salvation of the souls
of men, so that there is hardly any doctrine or
practice peculiar to that church, and differing from
our common christianity, but it hath a direct and
visible tendency to the promoting of some worldly
interest or other. For instance, why do they deny
the people the holy scriptures and the service of
GOD in a language which they can understand?
but that by keeping them in ignorance, they may
have them in more perfect slavery and subjection
to them? why do they forbid their priests to
marry? but that they may have no interest distinct
from that of their church, and leave all to it when
they die? to what end is auricular confession? but
to keep people in awe, by the knowledge of their
secrets? why must the laity only receive the sacra-
ment

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ment in one kind, but to draw a greater reverence to the priest, whose privilege it shall be to receive in both? and why is the intention of the priest necessary to the efficacy of the sacraments? but to persuade the people, that notwithstanding the gracious intention of GOD toward mankind, they cannot be saved without the good-will of the priest? the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences are a plain device to make their markets of the sins and souls of men. I might instance in a hundred things more in that church, which are of the same tendency. This St. John foretold should be the character of the spirit of antichrist, that it should be a worldly spirit, and the doctrines of it should serve a secular interest and design, 1 John iv. 5. "They are of the world, and they speak from the world, and the world hears them." What church is there in the world, so true throughout to the interest of religion, as this worldly church hath been to its own secular power and greatness?

2dly, "the children of this world" are wiser in the choice of means in order to their end; and this is a great part of wisdom. For some means will bring about an end with less pains and difficulty, and expence of time than others. And the men of the world are very ingenious in discerning the fitness and force of means to their several ends. To what a certainty have men reduced all the ways and arts of gain, and growing rich, and of rising to honour and preferment? what long trains will men lay to bring about their desired end? what subtile methods have men devised, to
insinuate

insinuate themselves into court; and when they are there, to plant themselves in the eye of their prince, and in the sun-shine of his favour? and then they have as many ways of worming others out, as of screwing themselves in. SERM.
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But in the concernments of our souls, and the affairs of another world, how dull and injudicious are we? and how awkwardly and untowardly do we apply means to ends, as if men were “only wise to do evil, but to do good had no understanding,” as the prophet complains? by what incongruous and irregular means do many (who would seem to be, and sometimes perhaps are, very zealous in religion) endeavour (as they think) to promote God’s glory, by pious frauds and counterfeit miracles, and telling officious lies for God? what a compass do many men fetch to go to heaven, by innumerable devices of will-worship, by voluntary severities, neither pleasing to God, nor profitable to men? by tedious pilgrimages and senseless ceremonies, and innumerable little external observances of no virtue or efficacy in religion? and by wandring through a wilderness of opinions, and the bushes and brakes of unprofitable questions, and controversies? whereas the way to heaven lies plain and straight before us, consisting in simplicity of belief, and in holiness and innocency of life. Not but that there are great differences in the church of Rome, between the secular priests and the regular; between the jansenists and the jesuits: but they still unite in a common interest, and are subject to antichrist their common head. They do not separate from one another, and excommunicate

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cate one another, and declare against one another, that they are not of the true church. "Satan never casts out Satan;" and though he loves divisions among christians, yet he always takes care, that "his own kingdom be not divided against it self," so as to endanger the ruin of it. And whenever they have any hopeful design for the extirpation of protestants, they can lay aside their enmities, and be reconciled in such a design. Then the pope and the kings of the earth "take counsel together," and like Herod and Pilate, when CHRIST was to be crucified, can be made friends at a day's warning. Whereas the divisions of the true church are pernicious to it, and, as we see at this day among ourselves, our senseless differences and wild heats on both sides, do contribute to the setting up of popery, and the ruin of the reformed religion; and yet no persuasion, no experience can make us wiser.

3dly, "the children of this world" are commonly more diligent in the use of means for the obtaining of their end; they will sweat and toil, and take any pains, "rise up early and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulness;" their thoughts are continually running upon their business, and they catch at every opportunity of promoting it; they will pinch nature and harass it; and rob themselves of their rest, and all the comfort of their lives to raise their fortune and estate. What drudges were Cæsar and Alexander in the way of fame and ambition? how did they tire themselves and others with long and tedious marches? to what inconveniences and dangers did they expose

pose themselves and thousands more? what havock and destruction did they make in the world, that they might gain to themselves the empty title of conquerors of it? when the men of the world engage in any design, how intent are they upon it, and with what vigour do they prosecute it? they do not counterfeit a diligence, and seem to be more serious and industrious than in truth they are; they are rather hypocrites the other way, and would conceal their covetousness and ambition, and not seem to aspire after riches and honours so much as indeed they do.

But in the pursuit of better things, how cold and remiss are we? with what a careless indifference do most men mind their souls? how negligent and formal, and many times hypocritical are they in the service of GOD, and the exercise of religion? with what a pitiful courage, and with what faint spirits do they resist sin, and encounter the temptations of it? and how often, and how easily are they foiled and baffled by them.

4thly, the men of the world are more invincibly constant and pertinacious in the pursuit of earthly things; they are not to be bribed or taken off by favour or fair words; not to be daunted by difficulties, or dashed out of countenance by the frowns and reproaches of men. Offer an ambitious man any thing short of his end and aim, to take him off from the prosecution of it; he scorns the motion, and thinks you go about to fool him out of his interest. Bait a covetous man with temptations of pleasure, to get his money from him; how generously will this mean-spirited man trample upon

pleasure, when it would tempt him from his design of being rich?

Difficulties do not daunt them, but whet their courage, and quicken their endeavours, and set a keener edge upon their spirits. Give an ambitious man almost a demonstration of the impossibility of his attempts; *contra audentior ibit*, he will go on so much the more boldly and resolutely. In the ways of religion men are apt to be discouraged and put out of countenance, by contempt and reproach; but a covetous man is not to be jeer'd and flurled out of his money and estate; he can be content to be rich, and give leave to those that are not so, to laugh at him.

Populus mihi sibilat, at mihi plaudo.

The rich worldling can hug himself and his bags, when the world hisseth at him; he can bear "to be hated, and persecuted, and have all manner of evil spoke against him for money sake:" and in the pursuits of these designs, men will, with great resolution, encounter enmity and opposition, and endure great sufferings and persecution. How many have been martyrs to their lusts, and have sacrificed their ease and health, and even their lives, in the prosecution of their ambitious, and covetous, and voluptuous designs?

But, on the other hand, how easily are men checked and diverted from a good course, by the temptations and advantages of this world; how many are cold in their zeal for religion, by the favour and friendship of this world? and as their goods and estates have grown greater, their devotion

tion hath grown less. How apt are they to be terrified at the apprehension of danger and sufferings; and, by their fearful imaginations, to make them greater than they are, and with the people of Israel to be dishearten'd from all farther attempts of entering "into the land of promise," because it is "full of giants and the sons of Anak?" How easily was Peter frightened into the denial of his master? and when our SAVIOUR was apprehended, how did his disciples forsake him, and fly from him? and tho' they were constant afterwards to the death, yet it was a great while before they were perfectly armed and steeled against the fear of suffering.

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5thly, the men of the world will make all things stoop and submit to that which is their great end and design; their end rules them and governs them, and gives laws to all their actions; they will make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not serve their end one way or other, they will have nothing to do with it. If an ambitious man seek wealth, it is but in order to his design to purchase friends, and strengthen his interest, and to make his rising the easier; he will lay his whole estate at the stake, rather than miss of his end. The covetous man will quit his pleasure, when it lies cross to his interest, if he have any expensive lust and chargeable vice, he will turn it off, or exchange it for some more frugal and profitable sin.

But in the affairs of religion, and the concerns of our souls, how frequently do men act without a due regard and consideration of their great end? and instead of making other things

S E R M. submit to it, they often bow and bend it to their inferior interest. They make heaven stoop to earth, and religion to serve a worldly design; and the glory of GOD to give way to gain, and the great concernments of their souls, and their eternal salvation, to their temporal profit and advantage. The men of the world are generally true to their great end, and pay it that respect which is due to it, and will suffer nothing to take place of it in their esteem and affection; and if men were as wise for their souls and for another world, they would bring all things to their great end, and make all the concernments of this temporal life to yield and give way to the great concernments of their eternal happiness. I proceed in the

Second place to give some account of this, whence it comes to pass, that “the children of this world” are wiser in their generation than the children “of light.” And this I shall do by considering what advantages “the children of this world” have, as to the affairs of this world, above what good men have, as to the concernments of another world. I shall instance in four or five of the chief.

1st, the things of this world are present and sensible, and because of their nearness to us, are apt to strike powerfully upon our senses, and to affect mightily to excite our desires after them, and to work strongly upon our hopes and fears: but the things of another world being remote from us, are lessened by their distance, and consequently are not apt to work so powerfully upon our

our minds. They are invisible to us, and only discerned by faith, which is a more obscure and less certain perception of things, than we have of those objects which are presented to our bodily eyes. "The things which GOD hath prepared for them that love him," the glory and happiness of the next world, are "things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard." "The children of light" do not see GOD, as "the children of this world" see mammon.

2dly, the sensual delights and enjoyments of this world, are better suited and more agreeable to the corrupt and degenerate nature of men, than spiritual and heavenly things are to those that are regenerate. In this lapsed and degenerate state of mankind, appetite and sense are apt to prevail above reason; and therefore those things which are most delightful to sense, we favour and mind, and love to busy ourselves about them, because they are most suitable to the animal life, which is the governing principle of corrupt nature.

And the reason of this is plain, because that principle in worldly and sensual men, which pursues earthly things, is in those who are unregenerate entire and undivided, and consequently the affections and inclinations of the whole man do all tend one way, and run out towards those things in a full and undivided stream; whereas good men are but regenerate in part, and tho' they have a principle of spiritual life in them, yet their affections are divided, and there is a great struggling and conflict between flesh and spirit, and it is a great while before the spiritual principle doth clearly prevail, and

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and get a perfect victory over our sensual appetites and inclinations. Mens affections to the world are entire and unbroken, and therefore they pursue these things with all their might: but the best men are but good in part; and that heavenly principle which is in them, is very much hindred in its operations by a contrary principle, our earthly and sensual inclinations, which are hardly ever perfectly subdu'd and brought under in this world.

3dly, the wordly man's faith and hope, and fear of present and sensible things, is commonly stronger than a good man's faith, and hope, and fear of things future and eternal. Now faith, and hope, and fear, are the great principles which govern and bear sway in the actions and lives of men. If a man be once firmly persuaded of the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and possessed with good hopes of obtaining it, and great fears and apprehensions of the dangers of missing it, this man may almost be put upon any thing. The merchant trafficks, and the husbandman plows and sows in faith and hope, because he is convinced that bread is necessary to the support of life, and hopes that God will so bless his labours, that he shall reap the fruit of them, and plainly sees, that if he do not take this pains, he must starve. But how few are there that believe, and hope, and fear concerning the things of another world, as "the children of this world" do concerning the things of this world? if any man ask me, how I know this? I appeal to experience; it is plain and visible in the lives and actions and endeavours of men. Good men are seldom so effectually and throughly persuaded

persuaded of the principles of religion, and the truth of the sayings contained in the holy scriptures, as the men of the world are of their own sayings and proverbs. Men do not believe that "honesty is the best policy," or as Solomon expresseth it, that "he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely;" as the men of the world believe their own maxims, that "a man may be too honest to live;" that "plain-dealing is a jewel, but he that wears it shall die a beggar." Few mens hopes of heaven are so powerful and vigorous, and have so sensible an effect upon their lives, as the worldly man's hopes of gain and advantage. Men are not so afraid to swear, as they are to speak treason; they are not so firmly persuaded of the danger of sin to their souls and bodies in another world, as of the danger to which some crimes against the laws of men do expose their temporal lives and safety; therefore they will many times venture to offend God, rather than incur the penalty of human laws.

4thly, the men of the world have but one design, and are wholly intent upon it, and this is a great advantage. He that hath but one thing to mind, may easily be skill'd and excel in it. When a man makes one thing his whole business, no wonder if he be very knowing and wise in that. Now the men of the world mind worldly things, and have no care and concernment for any thing else. It is a saying, I think, of Thomas Aquinas, *cave ab illo qui unicum legit librum*: "he is a dangerous man that reads but one book;" he that gives his mind but to one thing, must needs be too hard for any man at that. Application to one thing, especially in mat-
ters

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ters of practice, gains a man perfect experience in it, and experience furnisheth him with observations about it, and these make him wise and prudent in that thing.

But good men, tho' they have a great affection for heaven and heavenly things, yet the business and necessities of this life, do very much divert and take them off from the care of better things; they are divided between the concernments of this life and the other; and tho' there be but "one thing necessary" in comparison, yet the conveniencies of this life are to be regarded; and tho' our souls be our main care, yet some consideration must be had of our bodies, that they may be fit for the service of our souls; some provision must be made for their present support, so long as we continue in these earthly tabernacles; and this will necessarily engage us in the world, so that we cannot always and wholly apply our selves to heavenly things, and mind them as the men of the world do the things of this world.

5thly, and lastly, the men of the world have a greater compass and liberty in the pursuit of their worldly designs, than good men have in the prosecution of their interest. The "children of light" are limited and confin'd to the use of lawful means, for the compassing of their ends, but the men of the world are not so strait-laced, *quocunque modo rem*, they are resolv'd upon the point, and will stick at no means to compass their end. They do not stand upon the nice distinctions of good and evil, of right and wrong, invented by speculative and scrupulous men, to puzzle business, and to hinder
and

and disappoint great designs. If Ahab have a mind to Naboth's vineyard, and Naboth will not let him be honest, and have it for a valuable consideration, he will try to get it a cheaper way: Naboth shall by false witness be made a traitor, and his vineyard by this means shall be forfeited to him. And thus the unjust steward in the parable provided for himself; he wronged his lord, to secure a retreat to himself in the time of his distress.

The third and last thing only remains, to make some inferences from what hath been said by way of application. And,

1st, notwithstanding the commendation which hath been given of the wisdom of this world, yet upon the whole matter it is not much to be valued and admired. It is indeed great in its way and kind; but it is applied to little and low purposes, employ'd about the concerns of a short time and a few days, about the worst and meanest part of our selves, and accompanied with the neglect of greater and better things, such as concern our souls, and our whole duration, even our happiness to all eternity. And therefore that which the world admires and cries up for wisdom; is in the esteem of God, who judgeth of things according to truth, but vanity and folly. "The wisdom of the world" (saith St. Paul) is foolishness with God." The rich man in the parable, who increased his goods, and enlarged his barns, and laid up for many years, did applaud himself, and was no doubt applauded by others for a very wise man: but because "he laid up treasure for himself, and was not rich toward God," that is, did not employ his estate

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to good and charitable purposes, therefore GOD, who calls no body out of his right name, calls this man “fool; thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall all these things be?” And our SAVIOUR here in the text, while he commends the “wisdom of the children of this world,” he adds that which is a considerable blemish and abatement to it, “the children of this world are wiser, εἰς τὴν γενεάν τῶν ἑαυτῶν, for their age,” for the concernments of this present life; but this is but a short and purblind wisdom, which sees but a little way, and considers only things present and near at hand; whereas true wisdom hath a larger and farther prospect, and regards the future as well as the present, and takes care to provide for it. Nay, our SAVIOUR gives the wisdom of this world its utmost due, when he says, “the children of this world are wiser for their generation;” for this is the very best that can be said of it, it seldom looks so far, and holds out so long. Many men have survived their own projects, and have lived to see the folly and ill fate of their covetous and ambitious designs. So the prophet tells us, Jer. xvii. 11, “As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.”

This is wisdom, to regard our main interest; but if we be wrong in our end, (as all worldly men are) the faster and farther we go, the more fatal is our error and mistake. “The children of this world” are out in their end, and mistaken in the

the main; they are wise for this world, which is S E R M.
inconsiderable to eternity; wise for a little while, CXXIX.
and fools for ever.

2dly, from what hath been said, we may infer, that if we lose our souls, and come short of eternal happiness, it is through our own fault and gross neglect; for we see that men are wise enough for this world; and the same prudence, and care, and diligence applied to the concernments of our souls, would infallibly make us happy. Nay, our SAVIOUR here in the text tells us, that usually less wisdom and industry, than the men of this world use about the things of this world, is exercised by "the children of light," who yet at last, through the mercy of GOD, do attain eternal life.

So that it is very plain, that if men would but take that care for their immortal souls, which they generally do for their frail and dying bodies, and be as heartily concerned for the unseen world, and for eternity, as they are for things visible and temporal, they would with much more certainty gain heaven, than any man can obtain worldly riches and honours. And can we in conscience desire more, than to be happy for ever, upon as easy and upon more certain terms, than any man can be rich or great in the world? for we may miss of these things after all our travel and pains about them; or if we get them, we may lose them again: but if we "seek the kingdom of GOD, and his "righteousness;" if we be sincerely good we are sure to have the reward of it, even that "eternal "life, which GOD, that cannot lie, hath promised;"

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if we “ lay up for our selves treasures in heaven,” they will be safe and secure there, where “ no moth
“ can corrupt, nor thieves break through and
“ steal.”

If we would seriously think of the other world, and were throughly possess'd with a firm belief of the eternity of that happiness or misery, which remains for men after this life, we should pray to GOD and hear his word, and perform all the duties of religion, with the same care and concernment, with the same fervour and intention of mind, as men prosecute their worldly business. Were we fully perswaded of the unseen glories and torments of the other world, we should be much more affected with them, than with all the temptations and terrors of sense; because in reason they are much more considerable. The disgrace of the pillory will fright men from perjury; and will not everlasting shame and confusion? the fear of death will deter many men from robbing and stealing, who would perhaps venture upon these crimes, if there were no danger in them; and will not the horrors of the “ second death, of the worm that
“ dies not, and the fire that is not quenched,” have as great an awe and influence upon us? If they have not, it is a sign, that we do not equally believe the danger of humane laws, and the damnation of hell.

Surely men have not the same belief of heaven, and affection for it, that they have for this world. If they had, their care and diligence about these things would be more equal. For we are not so weak as we make our selves; we are not yet so degenerate,

degenerate, but if we would set our selves seriously S E R M. CXXIX. to it, and earnestly beg the assistance of G O D's grace, we might come to know our duty, and our wills might be engaged to follow the directions of our understandings, and our affections to obey the command of our wills, and our actions to follow the impulse of our affections. Much of this is naturally in our power; and what is wanting, the grace of G O D is ready to supply. We can go to the church, and we can hear the word of G O D, and we can consider what we hear, we can pray to G O D, and say, "we believe, L O R D help our unbelief," and enable us to do what thou requirest of us; and we can forbear a great many sins, which we rashly and wilfully run into; a great present danger will fright us from sin, a terrible storm will drive us to our devotion, and teach us to pray; a sharp fit of the gout will take a man off from drinking; the eye of a master or magistrate will restrain men from many things, which they say they cannot forbear. So that we do but counterfeit, and make our selves more cripples than we are, that we may be pitied; for if fear will restrain us, it is a sign that we can forbear; if "the rod of affliction will fetch it out" of us, and make us do that, which at other times we say we are unable to do, this is a demonstration that it is in us, and that the thing is in our power.

It is true, we can do nothing that is good without the assistance of G O D's grace: but that assistance which we may have for the asking, is in effect in our own power. So that if the matter were searched to the bottom, it is not want of power that

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that hinders us from doing our duty, but sloth and negligence; for GOD hath “given us exceeding
“great and precious promises, whereby we may be
“made partakers of a divine nature;” and by virtue whereof, if we be not wanting to our selves, we may “cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh
“and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of
“GOD.”

3dly and lastly, what a shame and reproach is this to “the children of light!” Our SAVIOUR speaks this by way of upbraiding, as we may judge by the terms of comparison which he useth, that “the children of this world should be wiser than
“the children of light,” that is, than “wisdom’s
“own children;” and that they should be “wiser
“in their generation,” that is, for the concerns of a short and inconsiderable time, than the others are for all eternity.

How should it make our blood to rise in our faces, and fill us with confusion, that the men of this world should be more prudent and skilful in the contrivance and management of their little affairs, more resolute and vigorous in the prosecution of them; than we are about the everlasting concerns of our souls! that a worldly church should use wiser and more effectual means to promote and uphold ignorance, and error, and superstition; than we do to build up the true church of CHRIST in knowledge, and faith, and charity! that the men of the world should toil, and take more pains for
“the deceitful riches;” than we do for “the
“true;” and be contented to hazard more for “a
“corruptible crown,” than we for “an incorruptible!”

“ tible!” that they should love pleasure more, than S E R M.
we do G O D, and mind their bodies and temporal CXXIX.
estates more, than we do our souls and our eternal
happiness!

Do but observe the men of the world, what a
pace they go, what large and nimble steps they take
in the pursuit of earthly things; they do not
seek riches “ as if they fought them not,” and love
the world “ as if they loved it not,” and enjoy the
present delights of this world, “ as if they possessed
“ them not;” tho’ “ the fashion of this world
“ passeth away :” but we seek heaven, “ as if we
“ fought it not,” and love G O D “ as if we loved
“ him not,” and mind eternity and the world to
come, “ as if we minded them not;” and yet
“ the fashion of that world doth not pass away.”

But to all this it may be said, you have already
told us, that “ the children of this world” have so
many advantages above “ the children of light,”
that it is no wonder if they excel and outstrip them;
and it is very true, that in many respects they have
the advantage of them. But if “ the children of
“ light” would look about them, and take all
things into consideration, they might see something
very considerable to balance the advantages on the
other side. It is true, the things of this world are
present and sensible : but so long as we have suffici-
ent assurance of the reality of a future state, and of
the rewards and punishments of it, the greatness and
eternity of these is such an amazing consideration
that no distance can render them inconsiderable to a
prudent and thinking man. And tho’ the men of
the world have an entire principle, which is not di-
vided

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vided between GOD and the world; whereas in good men there is a great conflict of contrary principles, the flesh and spirit: yet this disadvantage is likewise balanced by that powerful assistance of GOD's grace, which is promised to all good men, who heartily beg it of him, and are sincerely resolved to make use of it. And lastly, tho' the men of the world have many ways to compass their ends; yet "the children of light" have one great and infallible one. All the means which the men of the world use to accomplish their designs, may fail and miscarry; for "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to all:" but he that sincerely serves GOD, and useth the means for the attaining of everlasting salvation, is sure to attain it; if we "seek the righteousness of GOD" as we ought, we shall certainly be admitted into his kingdom. And this surely is an unspeakable advantage which "the children of light" have above "the children of this world," that if we faithfully use the means, we cannot fail of the end; "if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life;" which GOD of his infinite goodness grant to us all for his mercies sake.

 SERMON

S E R M O N CXXX.

Concerning the perfection of GOD.

M A T T H. v. 48.

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your FATHER
which is in heaven is perfect.*

TH E S E words are the conclusion which our SERM.
SAVIOUR draws from those precepts of CXXX.
 greater perfection, than any laws that were The first
 extant in the world before, ver. 44. " I say unto you, sermon on
 " love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do this text.
 " good to them that hate you, and pray for those
 " that despitefully use you and persecute you." And
 to persuade them hereto, he propounds to them
 the pattern of the divine perfection ; telling them,
 that being thus affected towards their enemies,
 they should resemble GOD, ver. 45. " That ye
 " may be the children of your heavenly FATHER ;
 " for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil, and
 " on the good ; and sendeth rain on the just, and
 " on the unjust."

And then he tells us, that if we be not thus af-
 fected towards our enemies, and those that have
 been injurious to us, we are so far from being like
 GOD, that we are but just level with the worst
 of men, ver. 46, 47. " For if ye love them
 " which love you, what reward have you, do not
 " even the publicans the same ? and if ye salute

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" your

SERM. "your brethren only, what do ye more than others?
 CXXX. "do not even the publicans so?" And then concludes, that if we would attain that perfection which the christian religion designs to advance men to, we must endeavour to be like GOD in these perfections of goodness and mercy, and patience; "be ye therefore perfect, as your FATHER which is in heaven is perfect." In which words we have,

First, the absolute perfection of the divine nature supposed; "as your FATHER which is in heaven is perfect."

Secondly, it is propounded as a pattern to our imitation. "Be ye therefore perfect, &c."

In handling of these words I shall do these four things.

I. Consider how we are to conceive of the "divine perfection."

II. I shall lay down some rules whereby we may govern and rectify our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD.

III. How far we are to imitate the perfections of GOD, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. I shall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here intended by our SAVIOUR is not impossible to us; and then conclude this discourse with some useful inferences from the whole.

I. I shall consider how we are to conceive of the "divine perfections:" these two ways,

I. By

Concerning the perfection of G O D.

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1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible perfection to G O D. S E R M.
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2. By separating and removing all manner of imperfection from him.

1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible perfection to G O D ; absolute and universal perfection, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particulars ; but whatever we can conceive and imagine to be a perfection, is to be ascribed to him ; yea, and beyond this, whatever possible perfection there is, or possible degree of any perfection, which our short understandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be ascribed to him. For we are not to confine the perfection of G O D to our imagination, as “ if we could find out the almighty to perfection : ” but, on the contrary, to believe the perfection of the divine nature to be boundless and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our highest thoughts and apprehensions.

More particularly, all kinds and degrees of perfection are to be ascribed to G O D, which either do not imply a plain contradiction, or do not argue some imperfection, or are not evidently inconsistent with some other and greater perfection.

Some things may seem to be perfections, which in truth are not, because they are plainly impossible, and involve a contradiction, as that what has once been, should by any power be made not to have been ; or that any thing, which by its nature is limited and confin'd to one place, should at the same time be in another. These things in reason are impossible, and therefore not

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to be supposed to fall under any power how unlimited soever. For if we once ascribe contradictions to GOD, we destroy his being; because then to be, and not to be, power, and no power, would be all one.

And then there are some perfections which do argue and suppose imperfections in them; as motion, the quickness and swiftness whereof in creatures is a perfection, but then it supposeth a finite and limited nature: for a boundless and immense being, that is every where present at once, hath no need to move from one place to another; and therefore, though motion be a perfection in creatures, there is no reason to ascribe it to GOD, because it supposeth a greater imperfection.

And there are also some imaginable degrees of perfection, which, because they are inconsistent with other perfections, are not to be admitted in the divine nature. For instance, such degrees of goodness and mercy may be imagin'd, as would quite exclude and shut out justice; and on the other hand such a strictness and a rigor of justice, as would leave no room at all for patience and mercy; and therefore such degrees are not really to be esteemed perfections. For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a divine perfection, which evidently clasheth with any other necessary and essential perfection of the divine nature. We must so consider the perfections of GOD, that they may accord and consist together; and therefore it cannot be a perfection of GOD to be so good and gracious as to encourage sin, and to overthrow the reverence of his own laws and government.

ment. 'Tis not goodness, but easiness and weakness, to be contented to be perpetually injured and affronted. 'Tis not patience to be willing to be everlastingly trampled upon. So likewise on the other hand, 'tis not a perfection to be so severe and rigorous, as to smite a sinner in the instant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from punishment, and to give time for repentance.

But whatever perfection is conceivable or possible, and argues no imperfection, nor is repugnant to any other necessary perfection, is to be ascribed to G O D ; for this is the most natural and easy conception that we can have of G O D , that he is the most perfect being. This natural light doth first suggest and offer to the minds of men, and we cannot conceive of G O D as meer power and will, without wisdom and goodness. Hence it is that the Greeks call G O D very often, τὸ ἀριστόν, “ the best of beings,” and the Latin, *optimus maximus*, “ the best and the greatest,” *beatissima & perfectissima natura, constans & perfecta ratio*, “ the happiest and most perfect nature, immutable and absolute reason:” and many other such expressions which we meet with in the writings of the heathen philosophers. I readily grant, that the first and most obvious thought which men have of G O D , is that of his greatness and majesty ; but this necessarily involves or infers his goodness ; as Seneca excellently reasons, *prius deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas*, “ the first worship of the gods, is to believe

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“believe their being; next to ascribe to them
“greatness and majesty, to ascribe to them
“goodness, without which there can be no ma-
“jesty.”

And we shall find all along in Plato and Tully, and the best and wisest writers among the heathens, that they every where attribute the highest excellencies and perfections to the divine nature, and do steer and govern all their discourses of GOD by this principle, that perfection is to be ascribed to him: and whenever any thing is said of GOD, they examine whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aside as a thing not fit to be spoken of him.

And in the scripture we do every where find perfection ascribed to the nature and works and laws of GOD, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him. Job xxxvii. 16. “Dost
“thou know the wondrous works of him that is
“perfect in knowledge?” And again, “Canst
“thou by searching find out GOD? canst thou
“find out the almighty to perfection?” Psalm.
xviii. 30. “As for GOD his way is perfect.”
Psalm. xix. 7. “The law of the LORD is per-
“fect.”

I shall not need to consider particularly the several perfections of the divine nature; I shall only give you a brief scheme and draught of them. Whatever perfection can be imagin’d either in the manner of being or acting, is to be ascribed to GOD; therefore, as to his nature, we say that he is a spirit, that is, that he is not meer body
or

or matter, because that would exclude several other S E R M.
perfections; for meer matter is incapable both of CXXX.
knowledge and liberty, being determined by necessary laws and motions; and yet without knowledge and liberty, there can be no wisdom nor goodness. We say of G O D, that he is of himself, and without cause, and does not owe his being to any other; and consequently that he is necessarily, and that he cannot but be, and cannot be otherwise than he is; for that which is of itself, did not choose whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwise; for to suppose any thing to deliberate or consult about its own being, is to suppose it to be before it is.

We must say of G O D likewise, that he is immense, and every where present, because to be limited is an imperfection; and that he is eternal, that is, ever was, and shall be; for to cease to be, is a greater imperfection than sometime not to have been.

And then we are to say of G O D, that he is the cause of all other beings; that they are made by him, and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the most perfect manner, by a glance of his mind, and by the meer beck and nod of his will, without long study or deliberation, without laborious pains and endeavours, and consequently that nothing is exempted from his knowledge and power, and providence, and that he administers all things in a way of goodness and wisdom, of justice and truth;

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truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their last end. All these perfections, and all other that are possible, we are to look upon the divine nature as fully and immutably possessed of, and that in an higher and more excellent degree than our finite understandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to ascribe all imaginable possible perfections to GOD, so we are to separate and remove all manner of imperfection from him. We must not obscure or blemish the divine nature with the least shadow or blot of imperfection. If we once admit of this, to ascribe any thing to GOD which argues imperfection, we strike at the foundation, and destroy one of the clearest and most essential notions which men have of GOD. And therefore we find the scripture very careful to remove all kinds of natural or moral imperfection from GOD. Gen. xviii. 25. "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the judge of all the world do right?" Deut. xxxii. iv. "A GOD of truth, and without iniquity." Rom. ix. 14. "What shall we say then, is there unrighteousness with GOD? GOD forbid," far be it from him.

Hence it is that in scripture holiness is so frequently ascribed to GOD, which signifies the purity and freedom of the divine nature from that which we call sin; and GOD is very solicitous to
give

give us such a notion of himself, as may remove ^{SERM.} sin and unrighteousness at the greatest distance ^{CXXX.} from him, because that is the greatest of imperfections.

Is it an imperfection to countenance sin? the

scripture acquits GOD of it, Psal. v. 4, 5. "Thou

"art not a GOD that hath pleasure in wickedness,

"neither shall evil dwell with thee." Is it an im-

perfection to go from ones word, or to change ones

mind? this likewise is removed from GOD. 1 Sam.

xv. 29. "The strength of Israel will not lye or re-

"pent: he is not a man, that he should repent."

Is it an imperfection to want any thing, to be lia-

ble to any thing, to depend upon any thing with-

out ones self for happiness? this also is to be

set far from him. Job xxii. 2, 3. "Can a man be

"profitable to GOD? or is it a gain to him, that

"thou makest thy way perfect?" Job xxxv. 6, 7.

"If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or

"if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou

"unto him? if thou art righteous, what givest

"thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?

"thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and

"thy righteousness may profit the son of man."

Is it an imperfection to tempt, or to be tempted to

sin? this is to be separated from GOD, "he can-

"not be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any

"man," saith St. James, chap. i. 17. And to men-

tion no more, is it an imperfection to be in any

respect mutable? this is denied of GOD. "With

"him there is no variableness, or shadow of turn-

"ing." Thus you see how we are to conceive of

the perfections of GOD, by ascribing all imagina-

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ble and possible perfections to him, and removing all shadow of imperfection from him. I proceed in the

Ild place to lay down some rules by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of GOD: the best I can think of, are these following.

First, let us begin with the most natural, and plain, and easy perfections of GOD, and lay them for a foundation, and rectify all our other apprehensions of GOD, and reasonings about him, by these; and these are his power, wisdom, and goodness, to which most of the rest may be reduced. Right apprehensions and a firm belief of these will make it easily credible to us, that all things were made and are governed by him; for his goodness will dispose and incline him to communicate being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. And infinite power and wisdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any disturbance of his ease or happiness, as Epicurus would seem vainly to fear; who in truth did not believe a GOD, but pretended only to deny his providence, and that he either made or govern'd the world, because he was loth to lay so much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if those things which are impossible and difficult to our weakness and folly, might not be infinitely easy to infinite power and wisdom.

Particularly the goodness and justice of GOD are not so difficult to apprehend, as the disputes and

contro-

controversies about them have rendered them to many. When we consider infinite knowledge and power, we may easily lose our selves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them: there is something concerning these, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our reason; we may not be able to understand how something may be produc'd from nothing, because it argues such an excess of power, as we cannot comprehend; but yet we are forc'd to acknowledge, that either the world must be produc'd from nothing, or that matter was eternally of it self, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite power should be able to produce it from nothing. So likewise we are not able to conceive, how GOD can certainly know future events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain causes, because we cannot apprehend infinite knowledge; but this we may easily be satisfied in, that infinite power and knowledge may be able to do, and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a child can imagine how a great mathematician can demonstrate his propositions. Only this we are sure of, as we can be of any thing, that no power can do that which is evidently impossible, and implies a plain contradiction.

We are not able perhaps to reconcile the particular providences of GOD with his universal goodness, justice, and wisdom, because we cannot see to the end of his ways and works at one view, and see every part with relation to the whole; which would

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appear very wise, if we knew the whole series of things, and saw the entire design together, as GOD himself does, to whom (as Solomon tells us) “ all his ways are known from the beginning.”

So that however we may be at a loss in our conceptions of GOD's infinite knowledge and power, yet goodness, and justice, and truth, are notions easy and familiar; and if we could not understand these, the whole bible would be insignificant to us. For all revelation from GOD supposeth us to know what is meant by goodness, justice, and truth: and therefore no man can entertain any notion of GOD, which plainly contradicts these. And it is foolish for any man to pretend, that he cannot know what goodness and justice, and truth in GOD are: for if we do not know this, 'tis all one to us, whether GOD be good or not, nor could we imitate his goodness; for he that imitates, endeavours to make himself like something that he knows, and must of necessity have some idea of that to which he aims to be like: so that if we had no certain and settled notion of the goodness and justice, and truth of GOD, he would be altogether an unintelligible being; and religion, which consists in the imitation of him, would be utterly impossible.

Now these being the most easy and intelligible perfections of GOD, by which he is said in scripture to declare his name, that is, to make himself known to us, we should govern all our reasonings about GOD (as concerning his decrees, and his concurrence with the free actions of men, and his particular providence, which are things more dark
and

and obscure) by what is more clear; and we shall find in scripture, that in all these points holy men do constantly appeal to these unquestionable and intelligible perfections of G O D. “ Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? (saith Abraham) that be far from thee. Shall not the judge of all the world do right? ” We may be mistaken; but G O D certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous; and he knows how to punish the wicked, and save the righteous: but we cannot be mistaken in this principle, “ that the judge of all the world will do right.” Thus Moses satisfies himself and others, concerning the particular providences of G O D towards the people of Israel. Deut. xxxii, 3, 4. “ I will publish the name of the L O R D: all his ways are judgment; a G O D of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.” This we certainly know of G O D. So St. Paul, Rom. ii. 2. “ Thou art inexcusable, O man ! ” Whatsoever excuse men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a principle, “ we are sure the judgment of G O D is according to truth.”

Secondly, let us always consider the perfections of G O D in conjunction, and so as to reconcile them with one another. Do not consider G O D as meer power and sovereignty, as meer mercy and goodness, as meer justice and severity; but as all these together, and in such a measure and degree as may make them consistent with one another. The greatest mistakes in religion are certainly sprung from this root, from separating the perfections of
G O D,

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GOD, and considering them singly, and framing such wide and large notions of one, as to exclude another: whereas the perfections of GOD agree together, and that is not a divine perfection which contradicts any other perfection. Among men indeed an eminent degree of any one excellency does usually shut out some other; and therefore it is observ'd, that power and moderation, love and discretion, do not often meet together; that a great memory and a small judgment, a good wit and an ill nature, are many times found in conjunction: but in infinite perfection all perfections do eminently meet and consist together; and it is not necessary that one excellency should be raised upon the ruins of another.

And if this had been well consider'd, men would not, by being too intent upon GOD's sovereignty, with neglect of his other perfections, have spoken those hard things about predestination: for the sovereignty of GOD doth by no means set him above the eternal laws of goodness, and truth, and righteousness. And if this were considered, men would not, by poring upon the justice and severity of GOD, be so swallowed up in despair: for GOD is not so severe, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning sinner. If this were well consider'd, it would check the presumption of those who encourage themselves in sin, by fancying to themselves a GOD of all mercy and goodness; and "because
" sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore their heart is fully set in them

" to

“to do evil:” for it is not goodness and mercy finally to bear with and forgive obstinate offenders, but want of prudence and good government.

Thirdly, among different opinions concerning GOD (as there always have been and will be in the world) choose those which are farthest from extremity; because truth as well as virtue usually lies between the extremes. And here I will instance in that controversy, which has much disquieted the church almost in all ages, concerning the decrees of GOD; about which there are two extremes, the one that GOD peremptorily decrees the final condition of every particular person, that is, their everlasting happiness or misery, without any regard or consideration of the good or bad actions of men. The other, that GOD decrees nothing concerning any particular person, but only in general, that men found under such and such qualifications shall be happy or miserable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themselves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man must be that understands the difficulties on both sides, had best take up in the middle opinion, that GOD decrees the final condition of particular persons with respect to certain qualifications, which, speaking absolutely, are not in every man's power; but yet, under the influence of GOD's grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, may be said to be in our power, in the same sense as St. Paul says, “I am able to do all things through CHRIST
“strengthening

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“strengthening me:” for besides, that this in all probability is the truth, there will be this advantage in it, that he that stands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the dissenters on both sides, than either of them will be to one another; because the middle is not so far from either extreme, as the extremes are from one another. At the worst, he stands fairest for an impartial enquiry after truth, and when he has satisfied himself where the truth lies, he may more silently pass over to it, without any great imputation of inconsistency; which cannot but be remarkable in him, who passeth from one extreme to another.

Fourthly, and lastly, entertain no opinion concerning GOD, that doth evidently contradict the practice of religion, and a good life, though never so specious and subtile arguments may be used to persuade it. Truth is most easily seen, and discern'd in those reasonings and opinions which tend to practice; because the absurdity and inconvenience of them is soonest discovered: whereas we cannot so certainly find out the truth or falsehood of those opinions, which speculative men devise in their studies, without any consideration whether they serve any real purpose of life or not. Men indeed are very apt to form those notions, which are most remote from common sense and use; because more pains and wit are required to make them plausible: but there needs no other argument to make a wise man despise them, than that they are unprofitable, and signify nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better.

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This is universally true in all kind of know-^{S E R M.} ledge, but most considerable in the knowledge of ^{CXXX.} GOD and religion; because that knowledge is of the greatest consideration. We need not scruple to admit some things, not so evident to natural reason, if we be satisfied of the truth of them, from an higher and more cogent reason: as that GOD has revealed it, and said it; this general-reason may persuade us of a thing that is above and beyond natural reason: but we may not admit any thing for a divine revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of an holy life; because this is the main end of all divine revelation; and we know GOD, only in order to the service and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge that contradicts practice, as vain and false, because it destroys its end. There are many things that seem probable enough in speculation, which yet we most pertinaciously deny, because they are not practicable; and there are many things, which seem doubtful in speculation, and would admit of great dispute, which yet because they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unquestionable. The ἀργὸς λόγος, the idle reasoning of the Stoicks, was a thing contemned by the wiser philosophers, as vain and useless subtilty. Zeno pretends to demonstrate there is no motion; and what is the consequence of this speculation, but that men must stand still? but so long as a man finds he can walk, all the sophistry in the world will not persuade him, that motion is impossible.

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impossible. In like manner, they that would persuade us, that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own sanctification, than stocks or stones, and upon scripture-metaphors misunderstood, (as our “being dead in trespasses and “ sins, and created to good works”) graft notions, which are impossible and absurd in practice, do not consider that the natural consequence of this is, that men must do nothing at all in religion, never think of GOD, nor pray to him, nor read his word, nor go to church; but sit still and be wholly passive to the operations of GOD’s grace. But however this may seem plausible, and men may think they add much to the glory of GOD’s grace, while they deny any power in the creature; yet every considerate man will presently apprehend, that this is by no means to be admitted, because it contradicts practice, and makes all the commands and exhortations of GOD’s word vain and to no purpose; because it destroys religion, and discourages the endeavours of men; makes them slothful and careless of “ working “ out their own salvation;” than which nothing can set a man farther from GOD’s grace and assistance, and more immediately dispose him for ruin; and upon some such false reasoning as this, the slothful servant in the parable “ hid his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth;” but when he was called to account, his excuse was not admitted, but “ he was cast into “ utter darkness.” The two other particulars, namely how far we are to imitate the divine perfections,

fections, and particularly what those divine qualities^{SERM.}
are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more ef-^{CXXX.}
pecially propound to our imitation, and likewise
to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to
shew that the duty here enjoin'd, "be ye per-
fect, as your FATHER which is in heaven is
perfect," is not impossible to us: both these I
shall refer to another opportunity.

A Table of the Texts of each Sermon.

S E R M O N CXI, CXII.

R O M. i. 18, 19. *For the wrath of GOD is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of GOD is manifest in them, for GOD hath shewed it unto them.*

page 1815, 1838.

S E R M O N CXIII.

J O H N xiii. 17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

p. 1861.

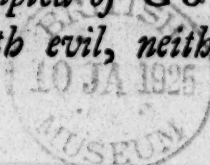
S E R M O N CXIV.

L U K E xii. 47, 48. *And that servant which knew his LORD's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

p. 1879.

S E R M O N CXV, CXVI.

J A M E S i. 13, 14. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of GOD; for GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*



A Table of the Texts.

man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

p. 1898, 1924.

S E R M O N CXVII.

MATTH. xi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. *Now when John had heard in prison the works of CHRIST, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, art thou he that should come; or do we look for another? JESUS answered and said unto them, go, and shew John again these things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

p. 1946.

S E R M O N CXVIII, CXIX.

MATTH. xi. 6. *And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

p. 1973, 1999.

S E R M O N CXX.

ROM. i. 4. *And declared to be the SON of GOD, with power, according to the SPIRIT of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*

p. 2021.

S E R M O N CXXI.

HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, and have tasted the good word of GOD, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall*

A Table of the Texts.

fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the SON of GOD afresh, and put him to an open shame. p. 2038.

S E R M O N CXXII, CXXIII.

H E B. v. 9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. p. 2066, 2089.*

S E R M O N CXXIV.

M A T T H. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. *And JESUS came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. P. 2113.*

S E R M O N CXXV.

L U K E xiii. 24. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. p. 2138.*

S E R M O N CXXVI, CXXVII.

L U K E xvi. 19, 20. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores. p. 2169, 2194.*

S E R M O N

A Table of the Texts.

S E R M O N CXXVIII.

LUKE xvi. 31. *If they bear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* p. 2222.

S E R M O N CXXIX.

LUKE xvi. 8. *For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of of light.* p. 2243.

S E R M O N CXXX.

MATTH. v. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your FATHER which is in heaven is perfect.* p. 2269.

The End of the Seventh Volume.



